VISIT…

THE ULTIMATE BEGINNER SERIES

BASS BASICS

CD INCLUDED

STEPS ONE & TWO COMBINED

- Bass Basics
- Picking Techniques
- Common Bass Lines
- Playing with a Drummer
- Slap/Pop Techniques
- Music Notation and Tablature
- CD Included
- Matching Videos Available

DALE TITUS ALBERT NIGRO

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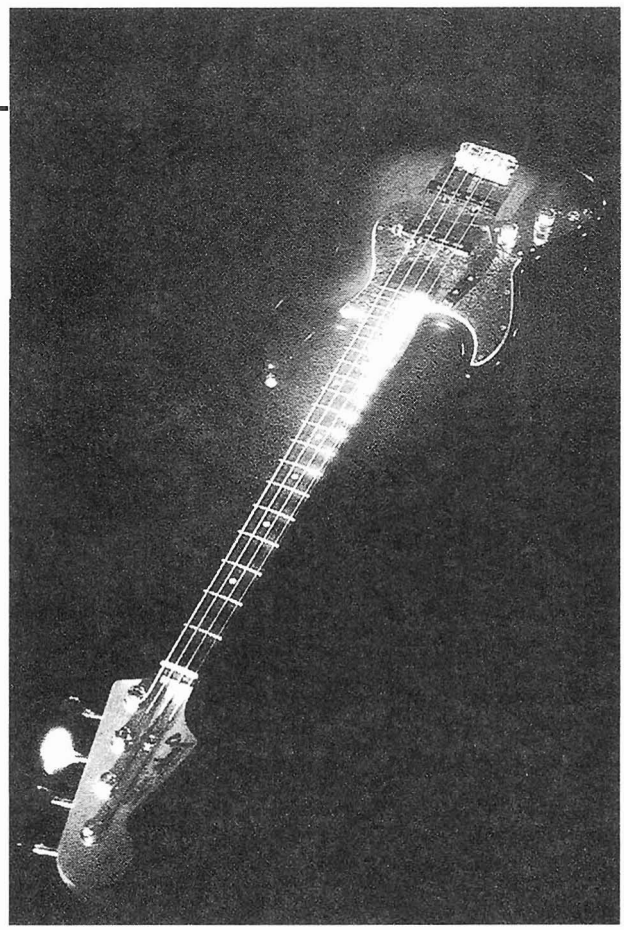
TYPES OF BASSES

CD 3

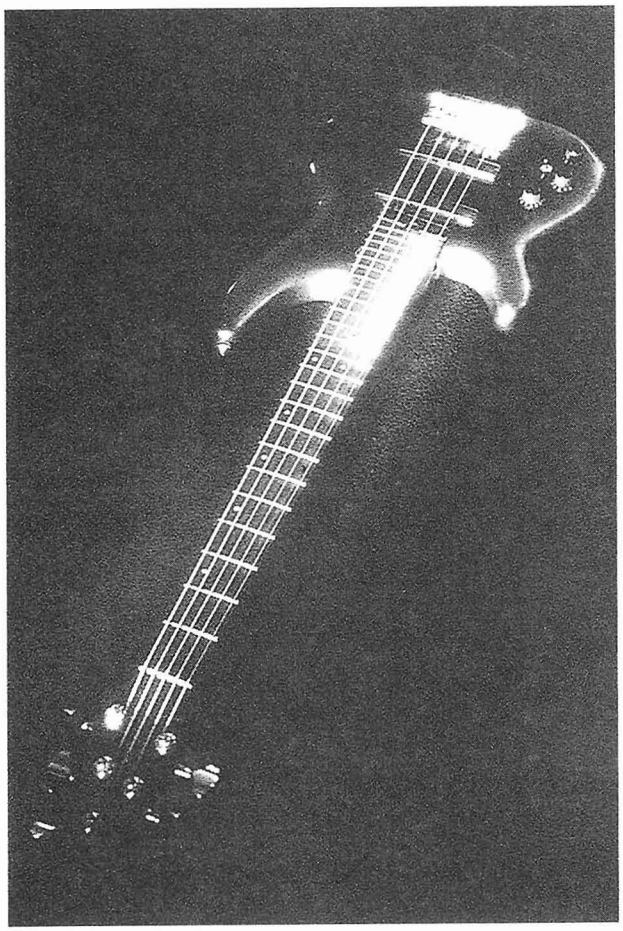
4-String

This is a four-string fretted bass. The four-string is the most commonly played bass today. Because of its simple design and versatility, the four-string bass is a great instrument for beginners.



Fretless Bass

This is a fretless bass. Because it has no frets on the fingerboard the fretless has a very distinctive sound. The fretless bass is also much harder to play so it is not recommended for beginners. If you happen to have a fretless, the information in this book will still be useful to you.



5- and 6-String Basses

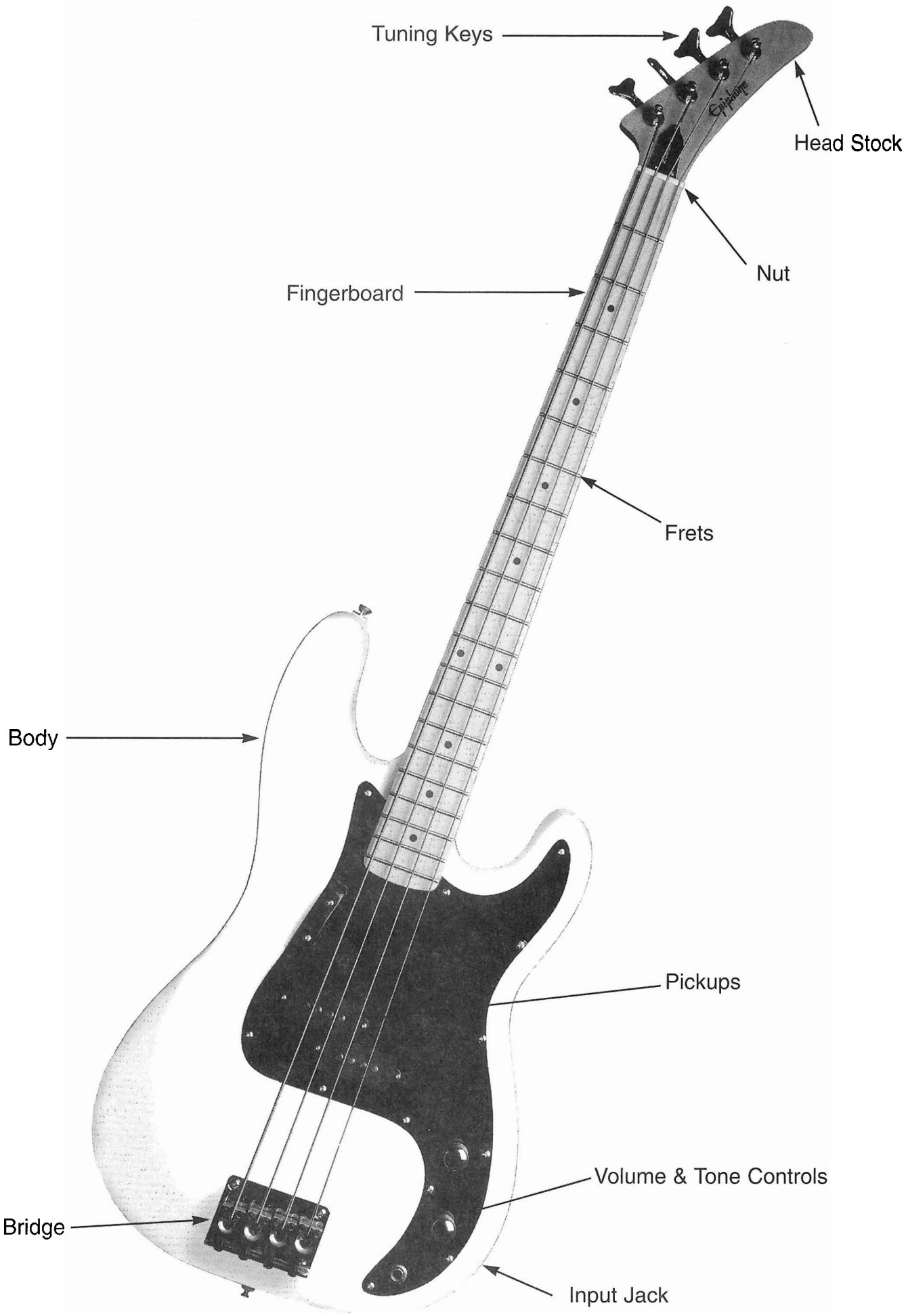
The five- and six-string basses are relatively new to the public, but are quickly gaining popularity. The extra strings allow players to cover a wider range of pitches. Because of their wider necks and higher selling prices, most five- and six-string basses are not recommended for someone who's just starting out.

Strings

Bass strings are available in three basic gauges: light (soft), medium and heavy. Start with a light to medium gauge set of strings. An approximate starting gauge is .040 for the G string, .060 for the D string, .075 – .080 for the A string and .095 – .100 for the E string.

PARTS OF THE BASS

CD 4



A state-of-the-art Warwick rack mount system

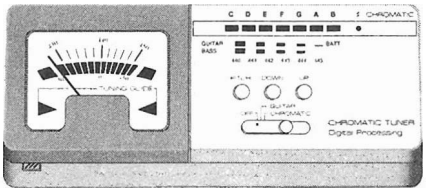
AMPLIFIERS

When you're first starting out, look for an amplifier that's reliable, has a good size speaker and has the most power that you can afford to buy. Power is not for volume, it's for clarity, and it is important to get as much as you can. If you have no idea where to start, go to your bass instructor or ask a trusted friend that plays bass. Then, go down to a music store and play everything they have, ask questions and make an informed decision.

HOW TO TUNE UP

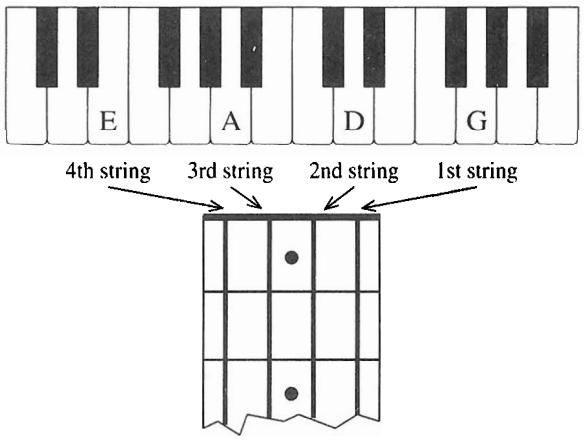
Electric Tuners:

Many brands of small, battery operated tuners, similar to the one shown below, are available. Simply follow the instructions supplied with your tuner.



Tuning to a Piano or Electronic Keyboard:

An easy way to tune a bass is to a piano keyboard. The four strings of the bass are tuned to the keyboard notes shown in the following diagram.



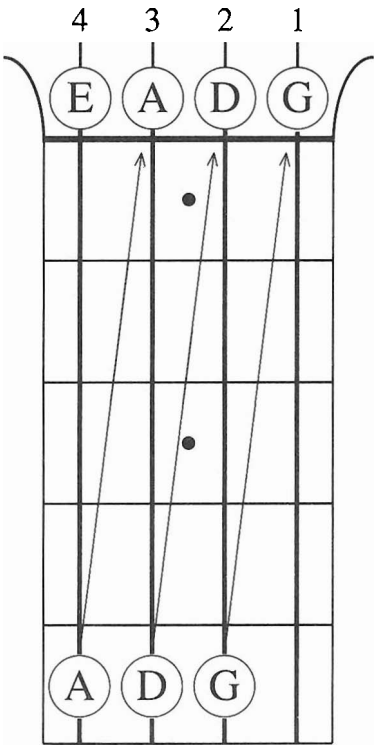
Tuning the Bass to Itself (Relative Tuning):

1. Tune the 1st string to G on the piano (or some other fixed pitch instrument, such as a pitch pipe).

2. Depress the 2nd string at the 5th fret. Play it and you will hear the note G, the same as the 1st string open. Turn the 2nd string tuning key until the pitch of the 2nd string matches of that of the 1st string.

3. Depress the 3rd string at the 5th fret. Play it and you will hear the note D, the same as the 2nd string open. Turn the 3rd string tuning key until the pitch of the 3rd string matches that of the 2nd string.

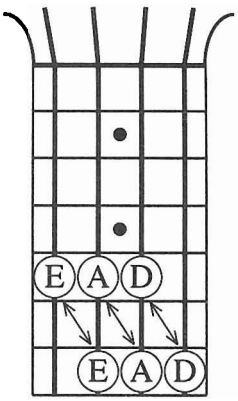
4. Depress the 4th string at the 5th fret. Play it and you will hear the note A, the same as the 3rd string open. Turn the 4th string tuning key until the pitch of the 4th string matches that of the 3rd string.



Tuning by Harmonics:

Another method of tuning is the harmonic method, which is a little more accurate because the tone is very pure and higher in pitch, making it easier to hear when the notes are in tune than using open strings. To play a harmonic on the bass, lightly touch the string directly over a fret (do not depress the string to the fretboard). Pluck with the picking hand. You should hear a ringing "bell" like sound.

To tune using harmonics:



1. Play the harmonic on the fifth fret of the E string. This should match the harmonic on the seventh fret of the A string.
2. Once those strings are in tune, match the harmonic on the fifth fret of the A string to that on the seventh fret of the D string.
3. Finally, repeat this using the harmonics on the fifth fret of the D string and the seventh fret of the G string.

Listen for the waves to slow down and eventually stop when the strings are in tune. This method can also be used with electronic tuners. If the tuner doesn't respond well to the open strings, try using the harmonics at the twelfth fret of each string instead. The higher pitch and clearer tone usually provide a better signal from the instrument to the tuner.

CHANGING STRINGS

There are a few reasons you may have to change your strings: one, of course, is if you break a string; but strings will become dull sounding and harder to tune the longer you play them, so eventually they'll have to be replaced.

To replace a string:

1. Remove the old string. Do not remove all the old strings from your bass at once because this releases too much tension, which is bad for the neck. It is safer to remove only one string at a time. Also, it is better to loosen the strings with the tuning keys rather than cut them with wire cutters. Save the old strings as spares in case a new one breaks.
2. After the old string has been removed the new string is seated to the bridge; that is, the ball end is placed through the tailpiece and over the saddles of the bridge. On some models, the string must be pulled through the tailpiece. Be careful to put the correct string in the correct place as the different strings each have a different tension.
3. Stretch the string along the fingerboard, insert it into the proper tuning key and tighten either by hand or with a peg winder, keeping tension on the string and making sure each winding around the post is towards the head stock, not the tip of the post.

On models with a split tuning key, a small amount of excess string should be cut off the tip to allow proper fit on the post, generally 2-1/2 to 3 inches above the tuning key post. Insert the tip of the string into the hole and bend the string into the slot on the post.

The strings should wind to the outside of the post, and each string has a specific slot in the nut to seat in. After changing the string there will be a period in which the string will stretch. This can be hastened by pulling on the string or simply by playing.

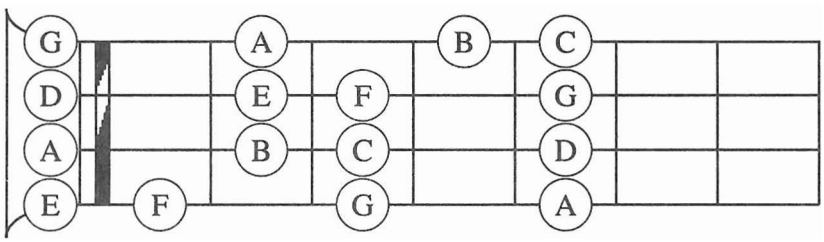
NOTE NAMES ON THE FINGERBOARD

It's vital to know where all the notes are located on the bass. This will make jamming with other musicians much easier. It has been said that there is no real money above the fifth fret; although that is meant as a joke, a bass payer can do a lot of playing within the first five frets. Most of the exercises in this book stay within the first five frets.

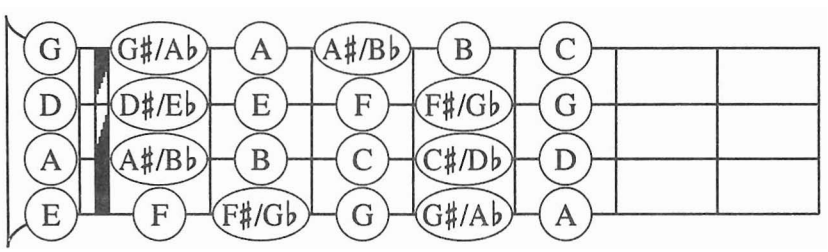
CD 5

The Musical Alphabet

The musical alphabet is made up of seven natural notes, named for the first seven letters of the alphabet (A - G). After G, we begin again with A. All notes are separated by a whole step, except for the notes E - F and B - C, which are separated by a half step. On the bass, a half step is equal to one fret and a whole step is equal to two frets.



The notes in between the natural notes have names relating to them. For instance, the note between F and G is called either F sharp (indicated by the ♯ sign) or G flat (indicated by the ♭ sign), depending on the direction the notes are heading. Sharps raise the note a half step (up one fret) and flats lower the note a half step (down one fret).

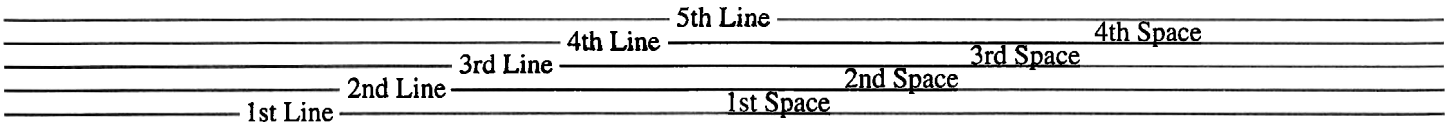


As shown in the tuning section, a note or pitch can be found in more than one location on the neck. Practice locating the same note on more than one string.

MUSIC NOTATION

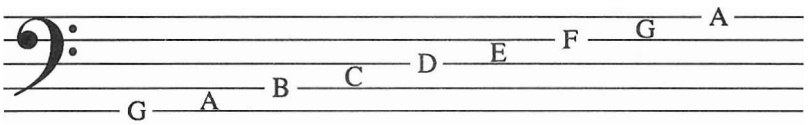
The rhythms and note names are indicated by the standard notation, and the location of those notes on the neck of the bass is indicated by the tablature. Here are some basic rules of standard notation:

Music is written on a staff, which consists of five lines and four spaces (between the lines):

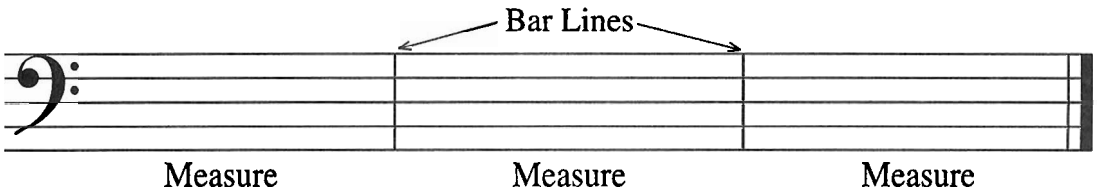


At the beginning of the staff is a bass clef (or F clef). The bass clef is used for all bass instruments.

The notes are written on the staff in alphabetical order. The first line is G:

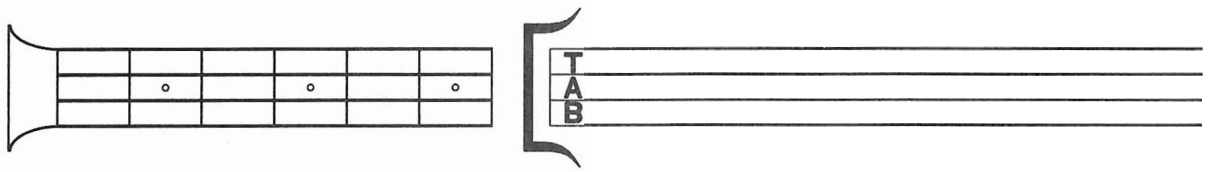


The staff is divided into *measures* by *bar lines.* A heavy double bar line marks the end of the music:

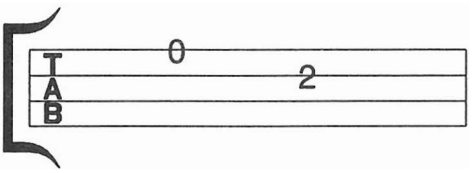


Tablature

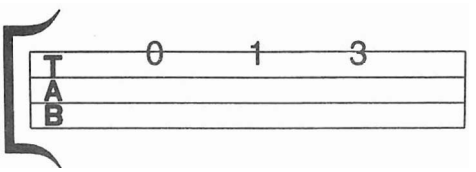
Tablature is commonly used in conjunction with standard music notation. Tablature illustrates the location of notes on the neck of the bass. This illustration compares the four strings of a bass to the four lines of tablature.



Notes are indicated by placing fret numbers on the strings. An "O" indicates an open string.



This tablature indicates to play the open, 1st, and 3rd frets on the 1st string.



RHYTHM NOTATION AND TIME SIGNATURES

At the beginning of every song is a time signature. 4/4 is the most common time signature:

4 Four counts to a measure
4 A Quarter note receives one count

The top number tells how many counts per measure, the bottom number tells which kind of note receives one count.

The time value is determined by three things:

1) note head:

2) stem:

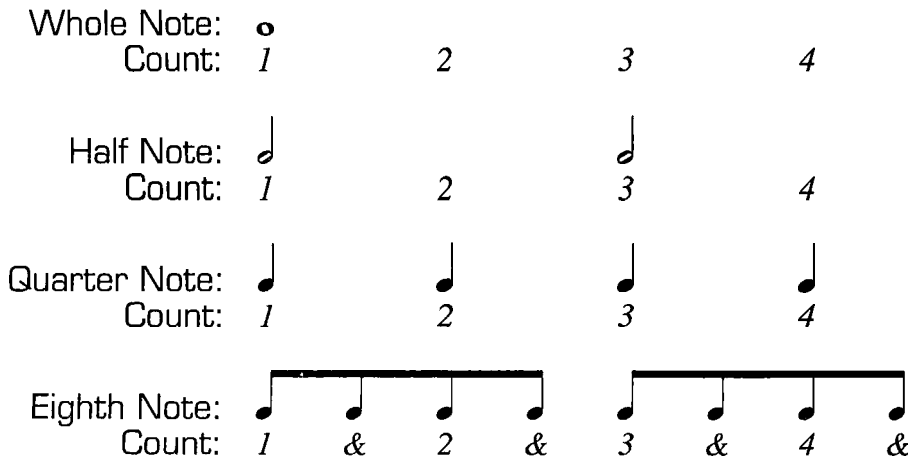
3) flag:

This is a whole note. The note head is open and has no stem.
In 4/4 time, a whole note receives 4 counts.

This is a half note. It has an open note head and a stem.
A half note receives 2 counts.

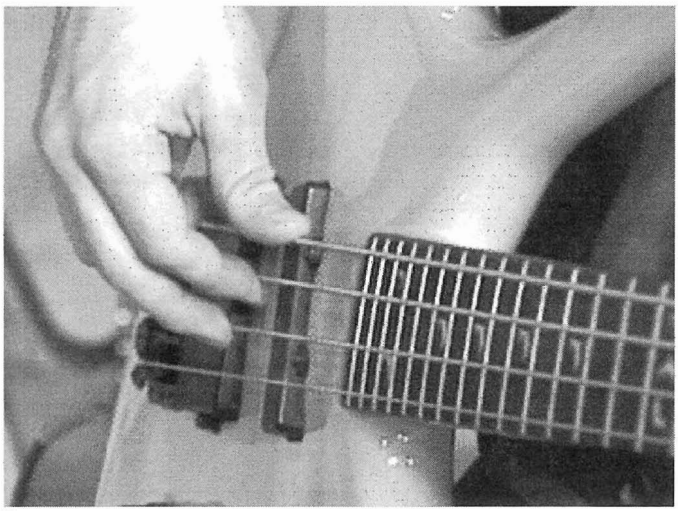
This is a quarter note. It has a solid note head and a stem.
A quarter note receives 1 count.

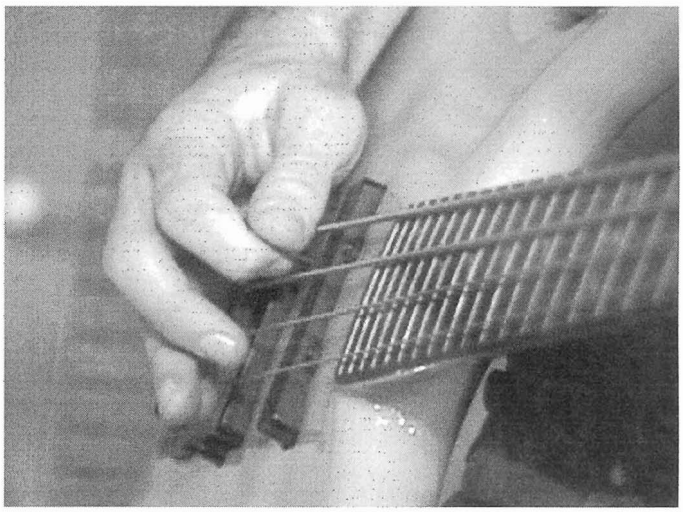
This is an eighth note. It has a solid note head and a stem with a flag attached.
An eighth note receives 1/2 count.



PICKING AND RIGHT HAND TECHNIQUES

CD 6 There are basically two ways to pluck the string: one is to use an actual pick, and the other is to play with two fingers of the right hand: the index and middle fingers. The pick gives a brighter sound with more attack and can be manipulated easier at faster tempos. The two-finger method is the most common, producing a warm and distinctive sound. When using this method, anchor your thumb to the bass, usually to the pickup. It is also important to alternate the right hand attack, either by picking down and up with the pick (indicated ⊓ and V) or alternating the index and middle fingers (indicated *i* and *m*).

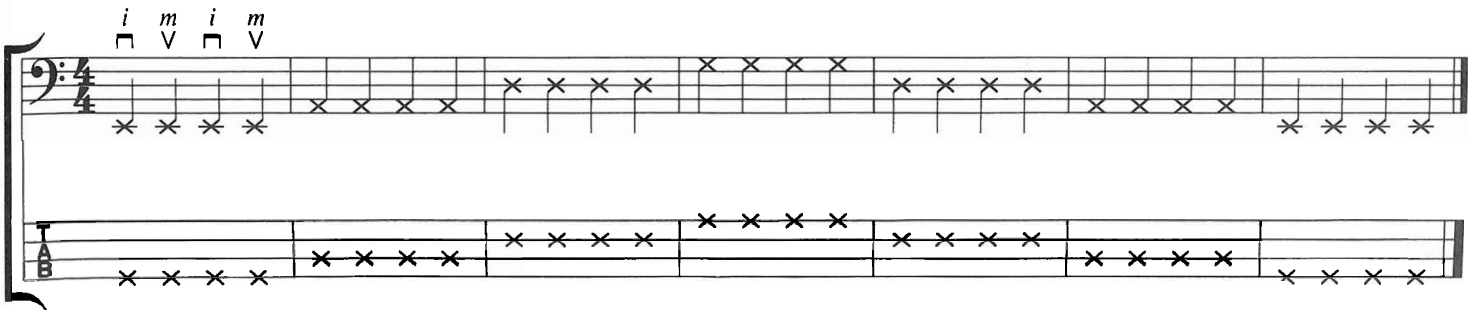




CD 7

Example 1: Open String Exercise

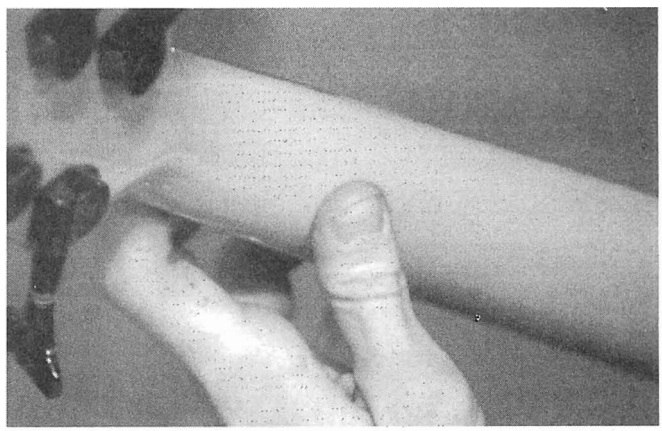
This exercise concentrates on the right hand exclusively. Mute the strings with your left hand by gently holding the strings without actually fretting them. Remember to alternate the picking in the right hand.

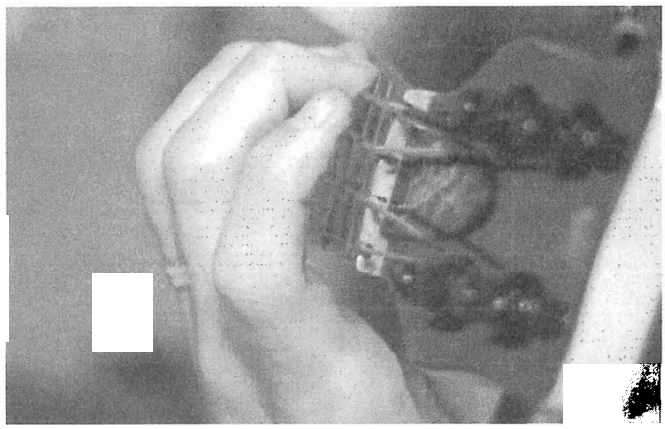


FRETTING TECHNIQUES

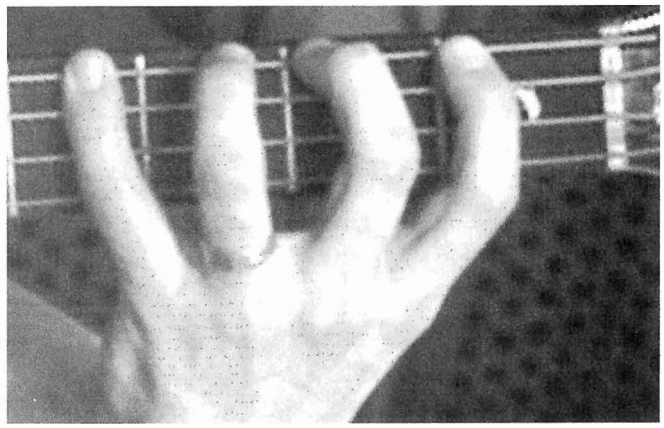
CD 8 Once some coordination is established with the right hand, it is time to move on to the left hand, developing some basic fretting techniques. There are a few rules to keep in mind while practicing:

1) Keep the thumb on the back of the neck.

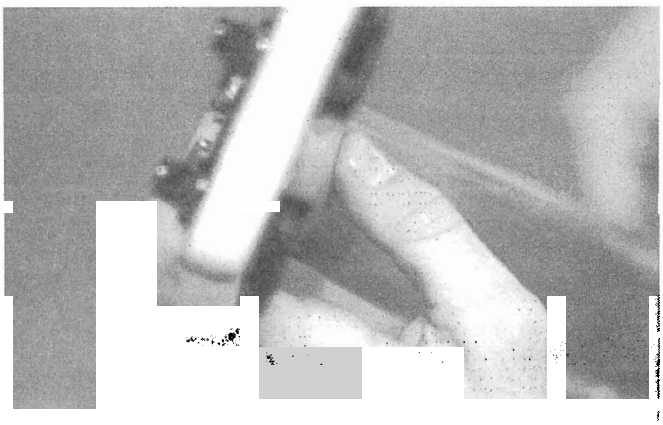




2) Play right behind, not on, the fret whenever possible.



3) Try to keep a one-finger-per-fret spacing with your left hand.

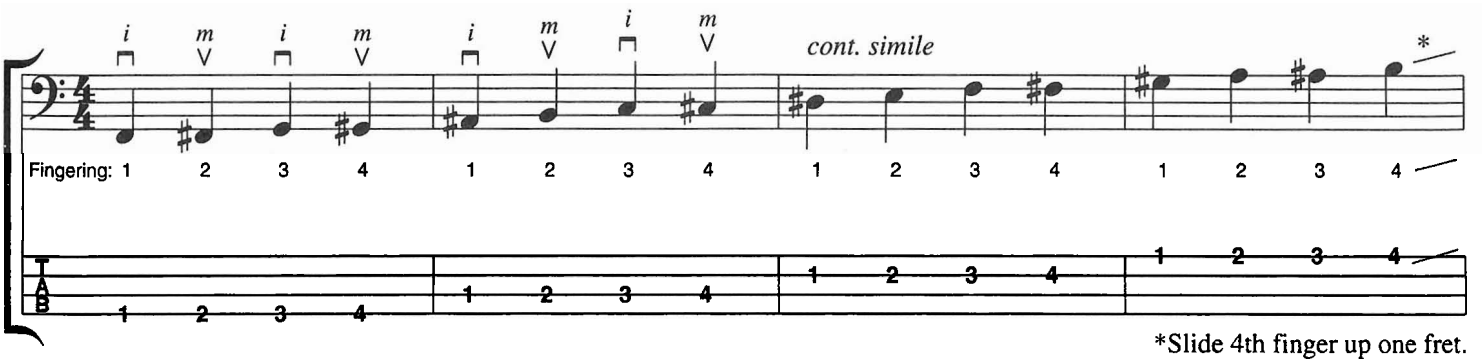


4) Leave a space between the palm of the left hand and the neck, not gripping too tightly.

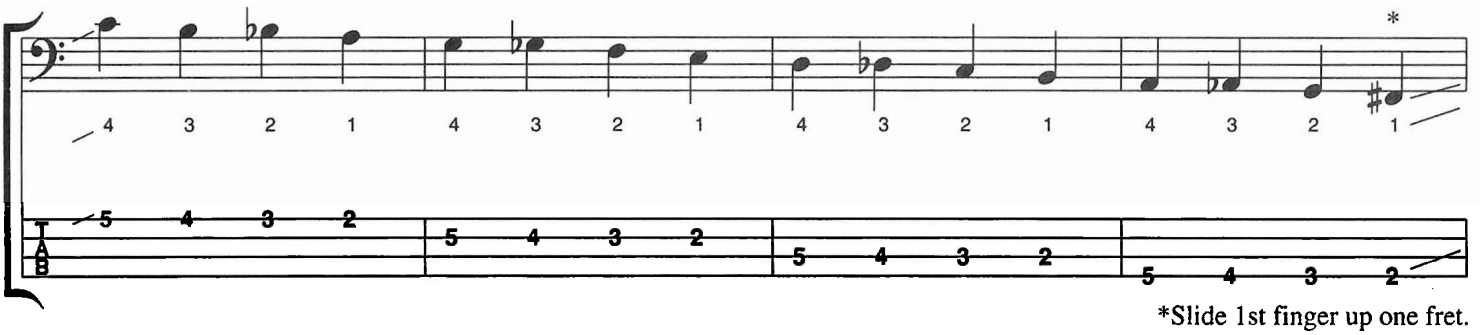
CD 9

Example 2: Fingerboard Exercise

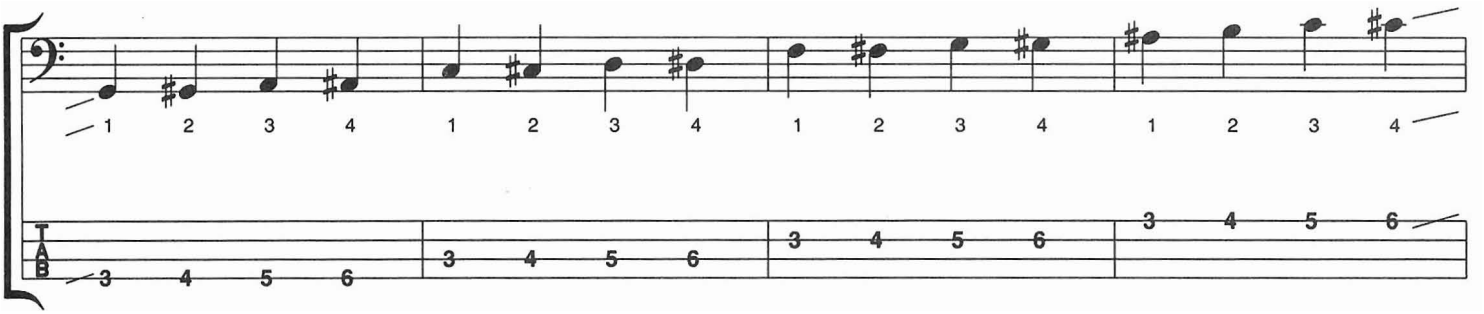
This simple exercise helps to develop good, clean fretting technique. While doing this exercise, make sure to alternate the right hand fingers (or pick) consistently.

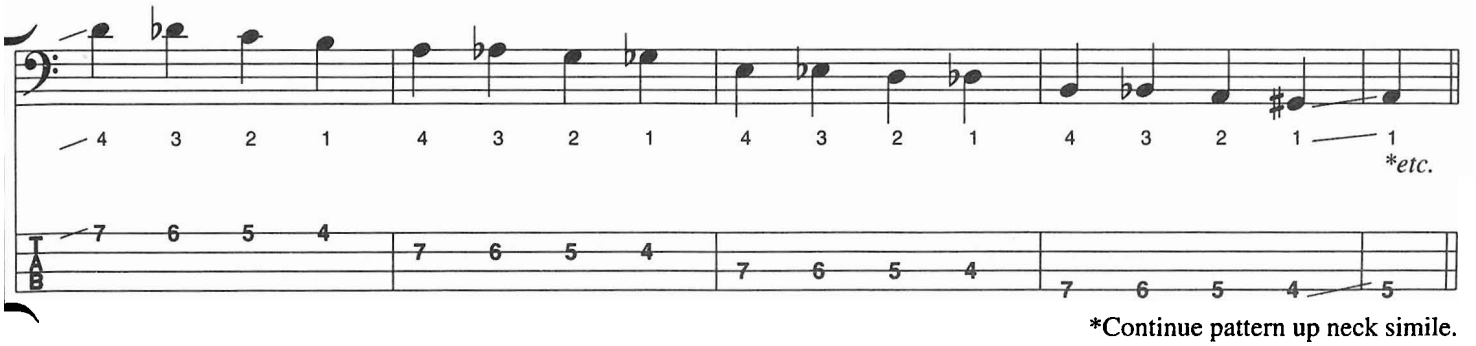


*Slide 4th finger up one fret.



*Slide 1st finger up one fret.





*Continue pattern up neck simile.

This is also a great exercise to develop technique up and down the neck of the bass. Spend about five minutes each day going through it to develop strong, consistent technique.

TIME TO PLAY

CD 10

Common Bass Lines

Let's talk about how to create some common bass lines. First of all, in many musical situations the one note the bass player plays the most is the root of whatever chord is being played at the time. The root, or tonic, of a chord is the note on which the chord is built, and is where the chord gets its name. (The root of a C chord is C.)

Occasionally, the bass player wants to play some other notes to add some color to their bass lines, so they turn to other chord tones besides the root, or arpeggios, to find which notes to use. An arpeggio is made up from the notes of a chord played one at a time. Let's start with the arpeggio of a very common chord type: the major chord.

CD 11

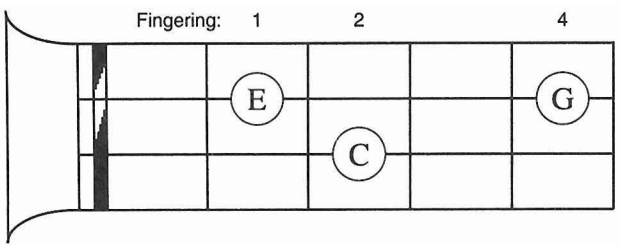
The Major Chord

The notes of a major arpeggio are the root, the third and the fifth. The third of a C major chord is three notes up the C major scale (C - D - E) and the fifth is five notes up the C major scale (C - D - E - F - G).

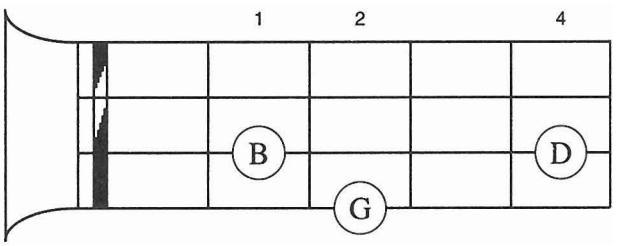
C Major Scale:	C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
C Major Chord:	C		E		G			
	1		3		5			

An easy way to play the major arpeggio is to play the root with the 2nd finger of the fretting hand. That makes the third easily reachable using the 1st finger, and the 4th finger can easily grab the fifth. This is great because you can move this arpeggio around just by knowing the root of the chord you're playing against. Practice this arpeggio pattern over C and then transpose it to G and D.

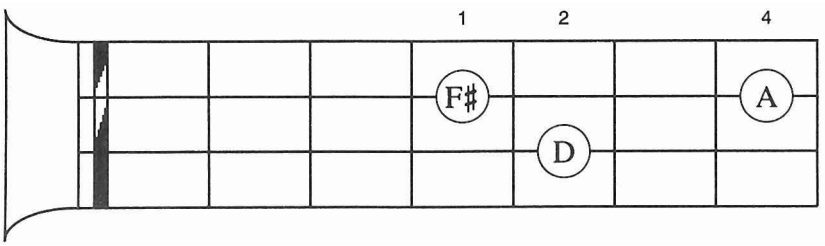
C Major Arpeggio



G Major Arpeggio



D Major Arpeggio

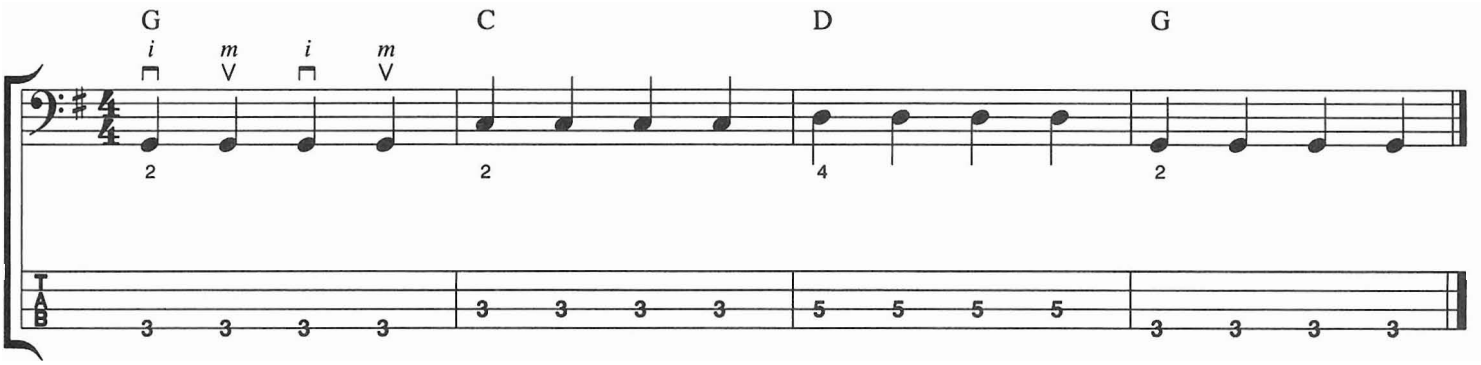


CD 12

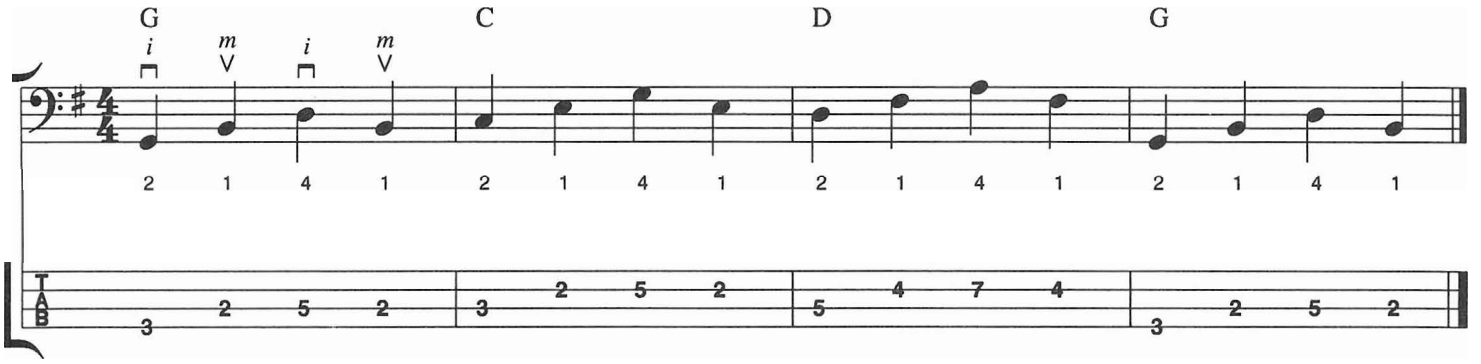
Example 3: G, C and D — Major Arpeggios

This example demonstrates three ways of creating a bass line using the major arpeggio with the roots G, C, and D. First, it gives just the root of each chord (Ex. 3A), then the straight arpeggio (Ex. 3B), next a little rhythmic variation that is similar to a common blues bass line (Ex. 3C) and finally a combination of these techniques (Ex. 3D). Play along with the rhythm track provided.

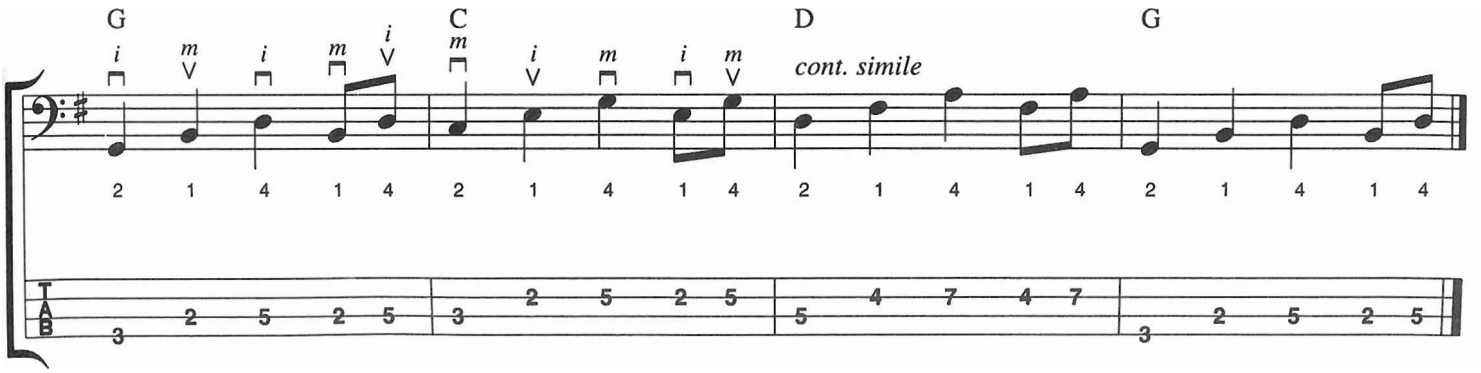
Example 3A — Root only



Example 3B — Major Arpeggio

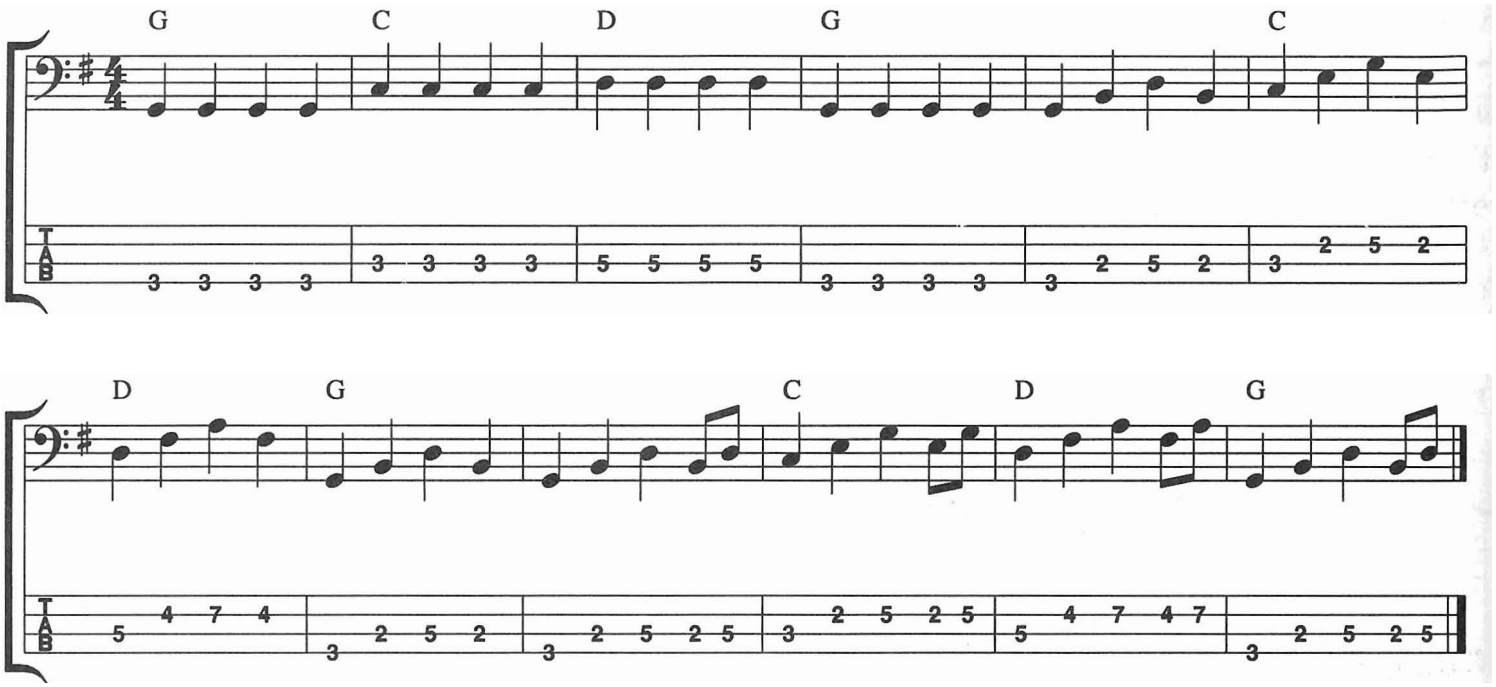


Example 3C — Rhythmic Variation



CD 13

Example 3D — Compilation



If while playing along you find it hard keeping up with the track, practice the patterns more slowly, until they become comfortable. It is important to always use a metronome or drum machine to maintain consistent time.

CD 14

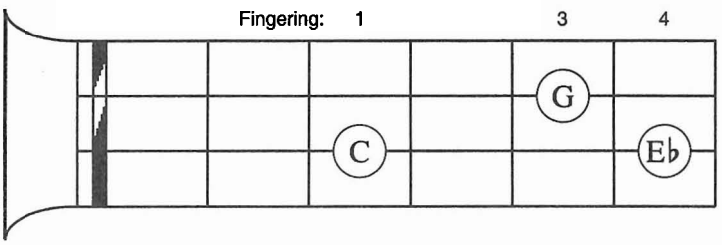
The Minor Chord

The minor chord is different than the major chord. The minor chord consists of the root, the flat third (a half step below the major chord third) and the fifth.

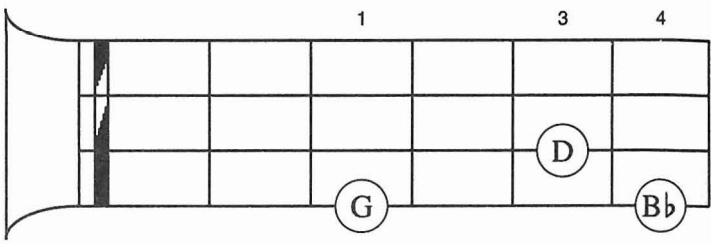
C Major Scale:	C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
C Major Chord:	C		E		G			
	1		3		5			
C Minor Chord:	C		E♭		G			
	1		♭3		5			

The following fingering pattern is perfect for the minor chord arpeggio because you can always start it with your first finger pointing at the root.

C Minor Arpeggio



G Minor Arpeggio

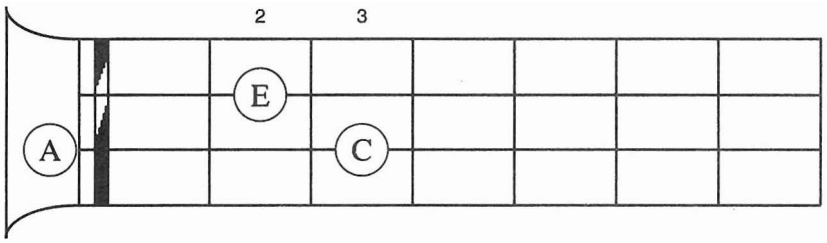


CD 15

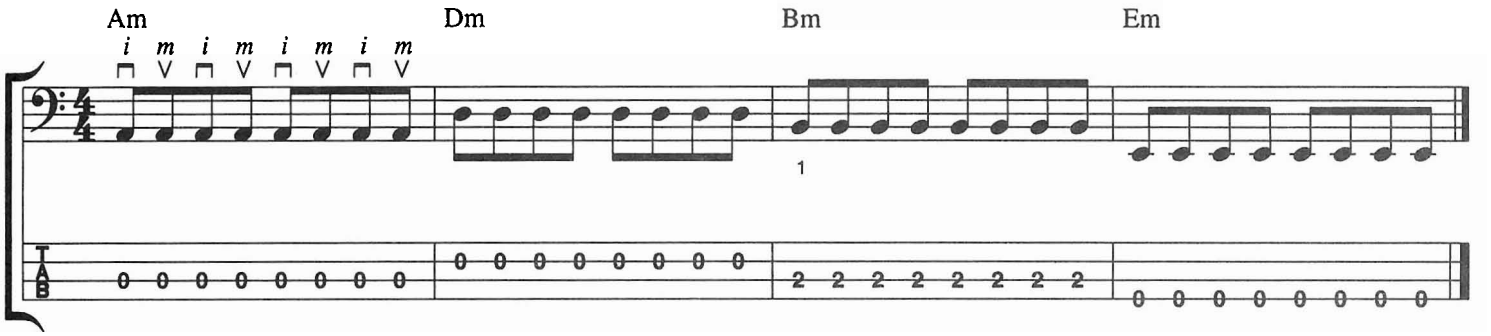
Example 4: Am-Dm-Bm-Em Arpeggios

This example demonstrates the minor arpeggio using the roots A, D, B and E. Like Example 3, Example 4 first gives the root only (Ex.4A), then the minor arpeggio (Ex. 4B), next a slight variation of the arpeggio similar to a popular bass line (Ex. 4C) and finally a combination of these three techniques (Ex. 4D). This example also uses open string roots, so the fingering pattern is different than the "moveable fingering pattern." The diagram below shows the minor arpeggio with the open 3rd string (A) as the root.

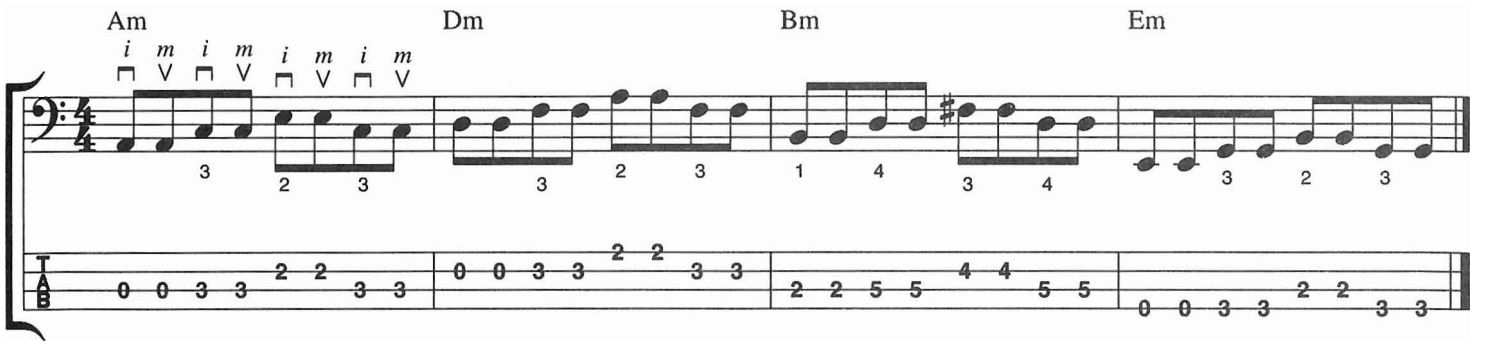
A Minor Arpeggio



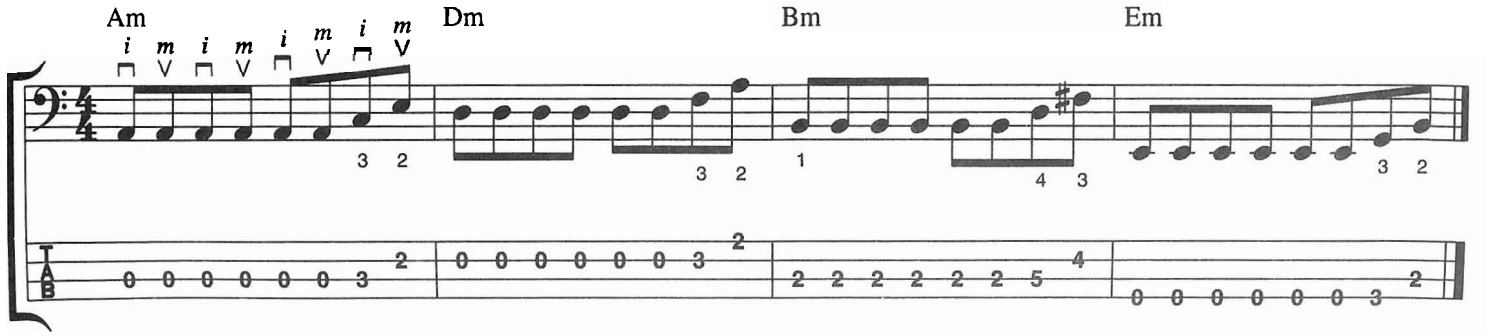
Example 4A — Root Only



Example 4B — Minor Arpeggio

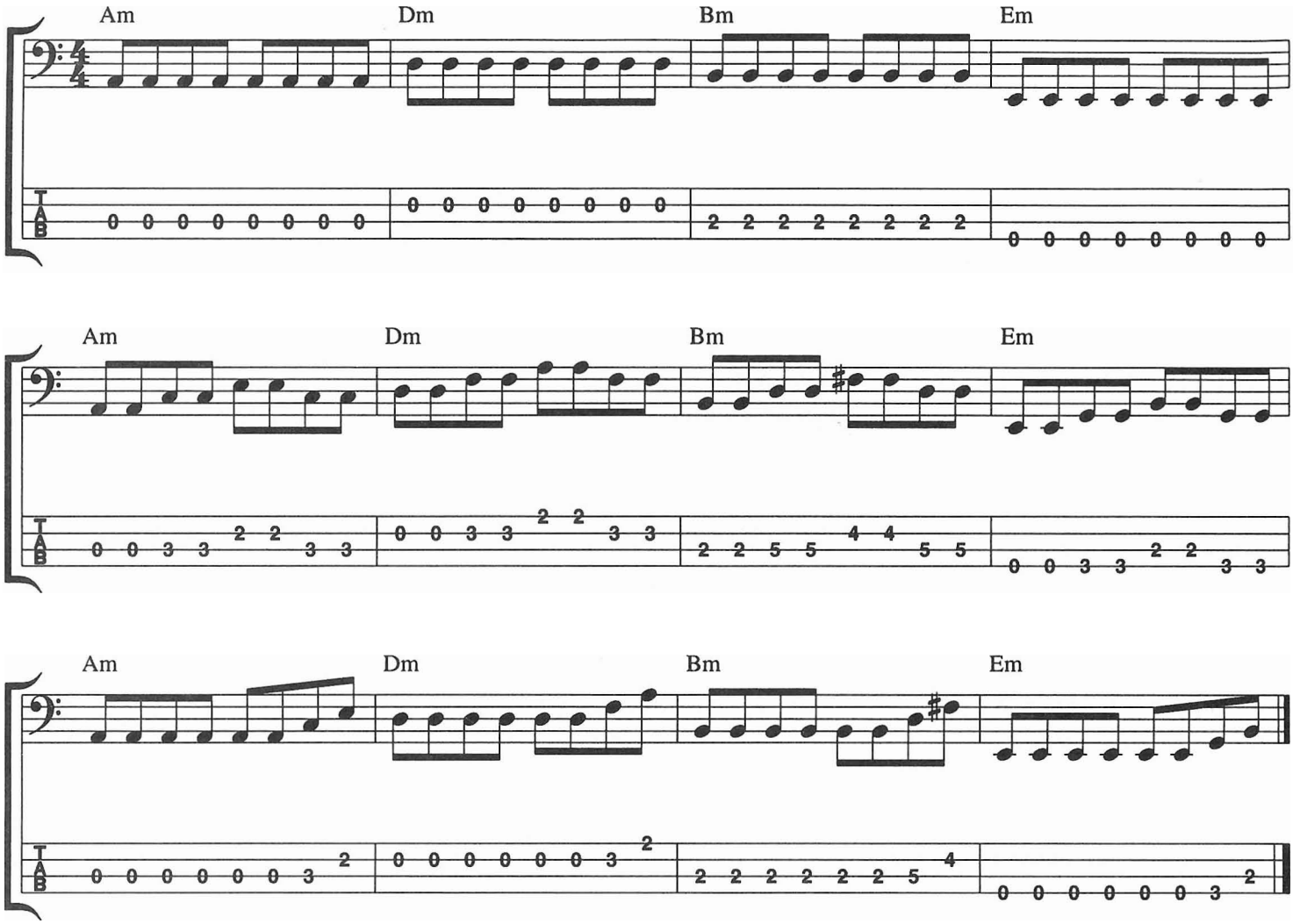


Example 4C — Rhythmic Variation



CD 16

Example 4D — Compilation

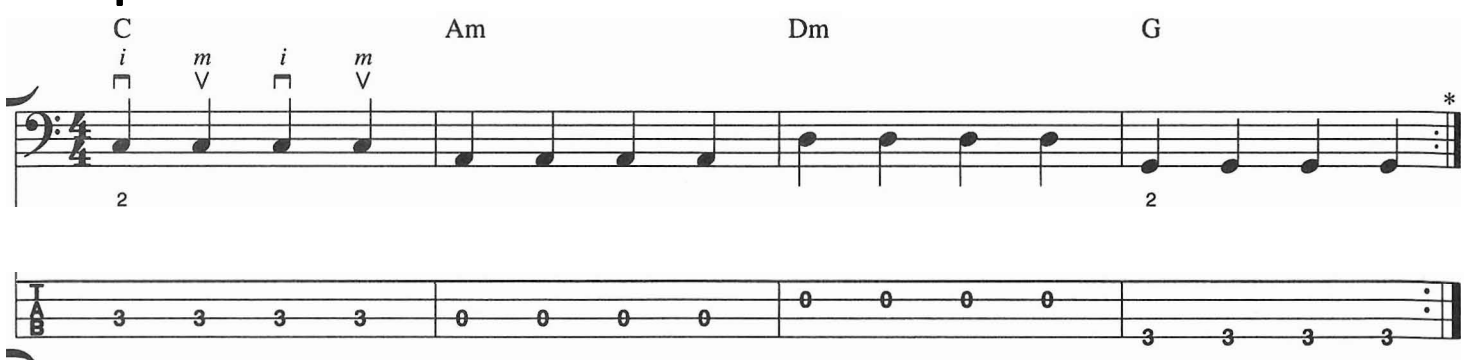


Practice repeating each individual chord separately to help develop technique and confidence.

Example 5

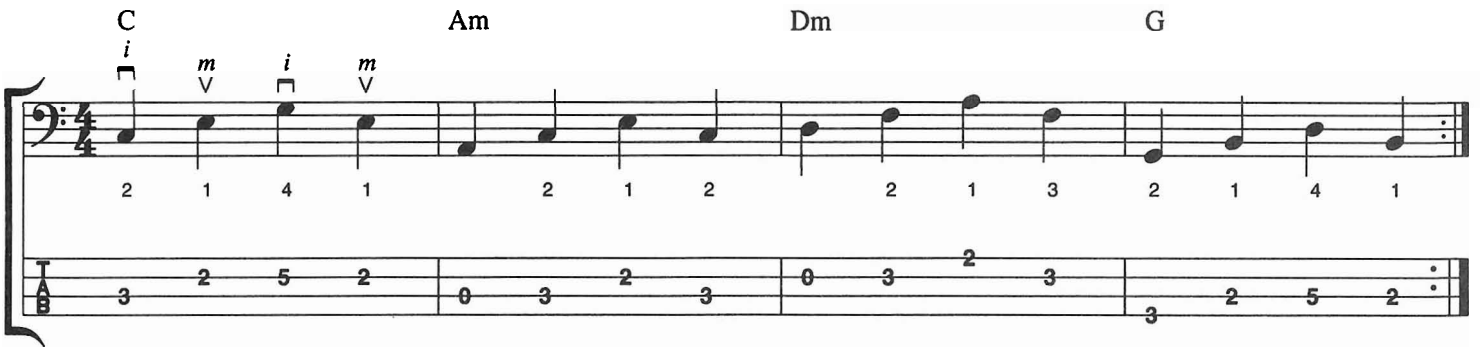
This example uses both major and minor chord arpeggios, and is based on a popular chord progression. A chord progression is a series of particular chords following a certain pattern. This particular progression can be found in songs such as "Blue Moon" and "Heart and Soul."

Example 5A

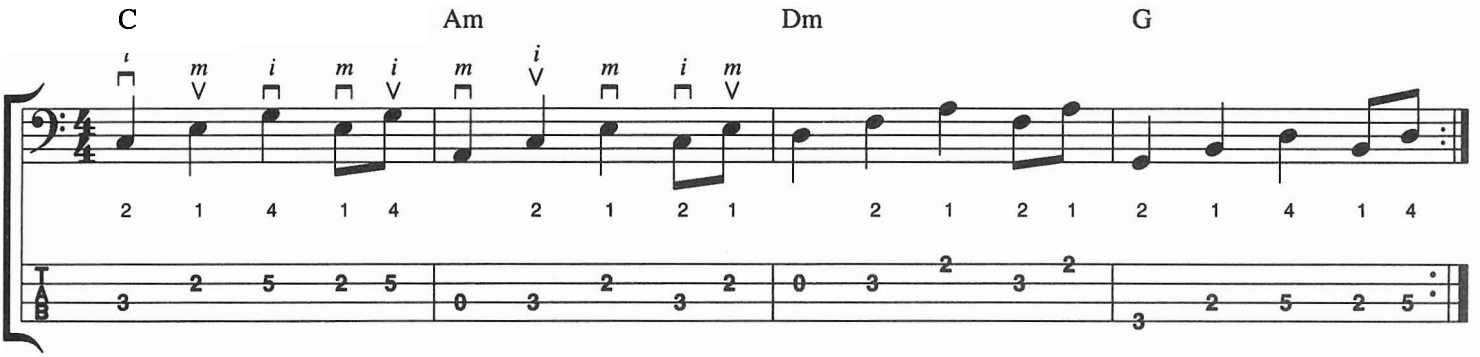


*Repeat sign — indicates to repeat back to the beginning.

Example 5B

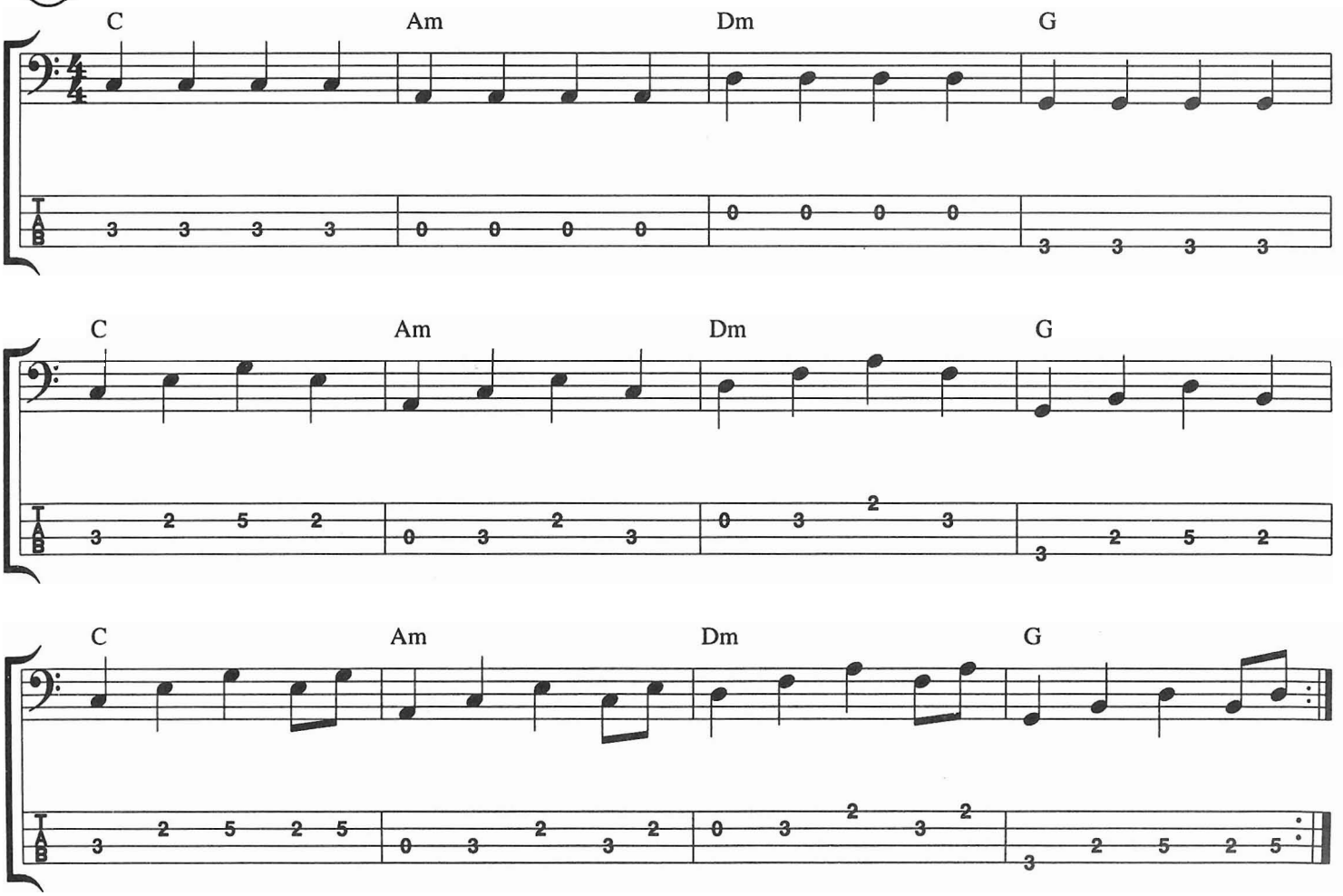


Example 5C



CD 17

Example 5D



For further study on arpeggios, practice identifying the major and minor arpeggios all over the neck. Just be sure to use the same patterns and be able to identify the root.

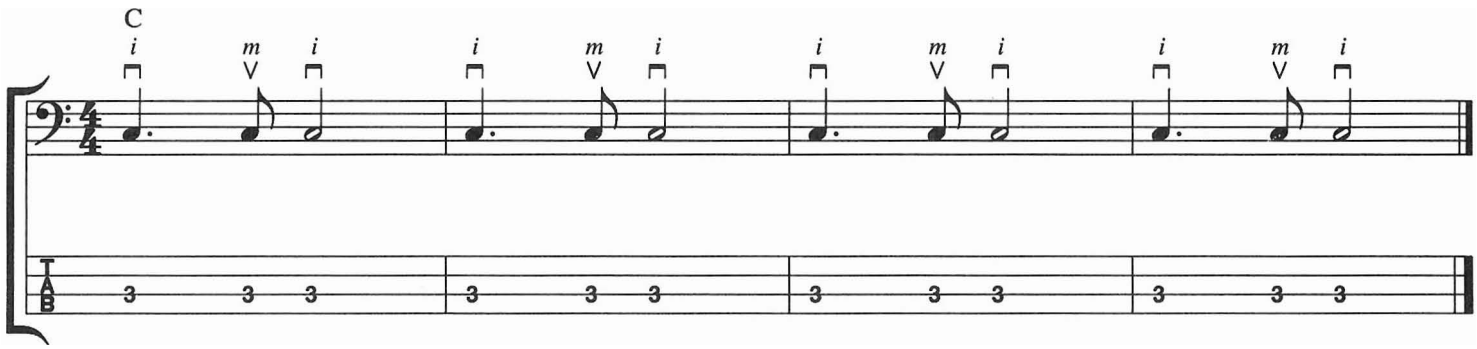
PLAYING WITH A DRUMMER

CD 18 As members of a band, the bassist and drummer need to be a tight, indivisible team. The bass player needs to be sure that what he plays locks in with what the drummer is playing. One way to do this is to focus in on one particular part of the drum kit, such as the bass drum or snare, and play so that it and the bass sound as one instrument. Following are several common patterns to help you practice this.

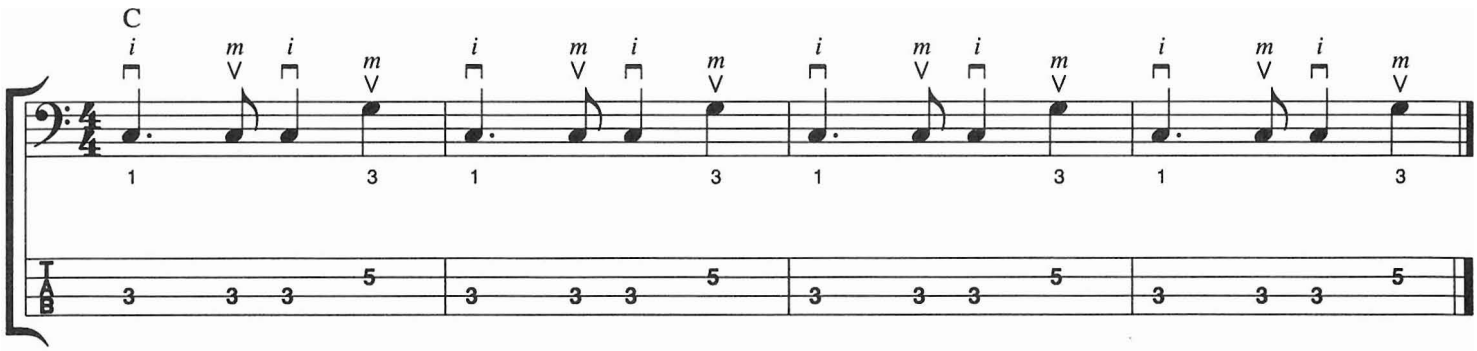
CD 19 Example 6: Ballad pattern

This first pattern is a common ballad feel. Play the root of the C chord with the bass drum (Ex. 6A), then when that feels comfortable, play the fifth of the C chord (G) with the snare (Ex. 6B), and finally, alternate between the two patterns (Ex. 6C).

Example 6A

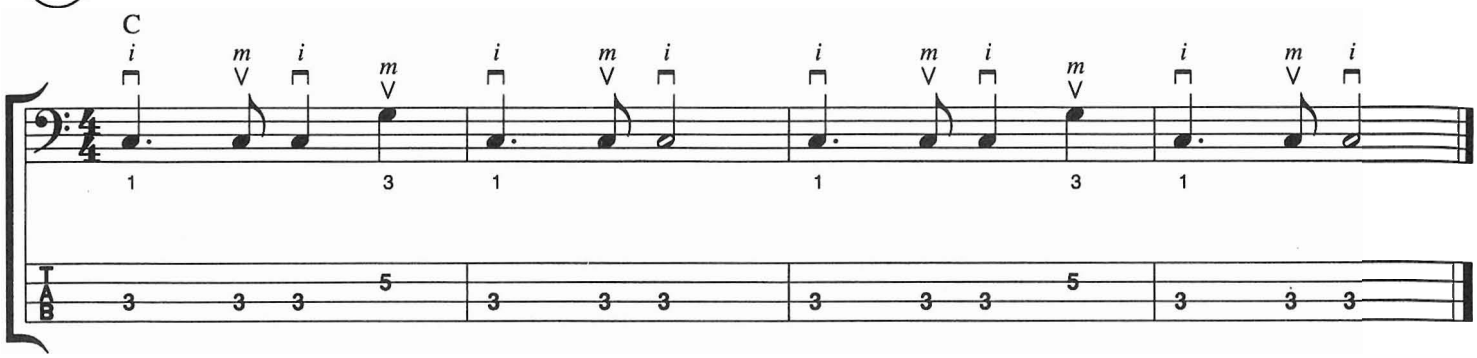


Example 6B — Adding 5th (G) with Snare

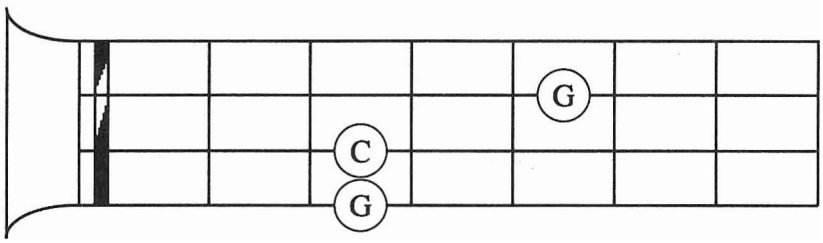


CD 20

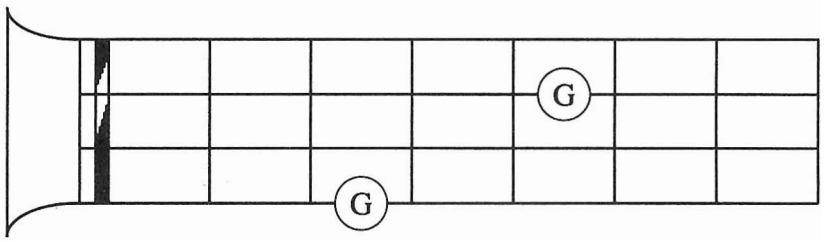
Example 6C — Variation



The previous example is a very common bass line to use when playing ballads: the root to the fifth above. However, the fifth can also be played below the root. The lower fifth is played on the same fret as the root, on the next lowest string. For example, the fifth of the C chord can be found on the third fret of the E string.



The fifths on the E string and D string are the same note, only an octave (8 notes) apart.

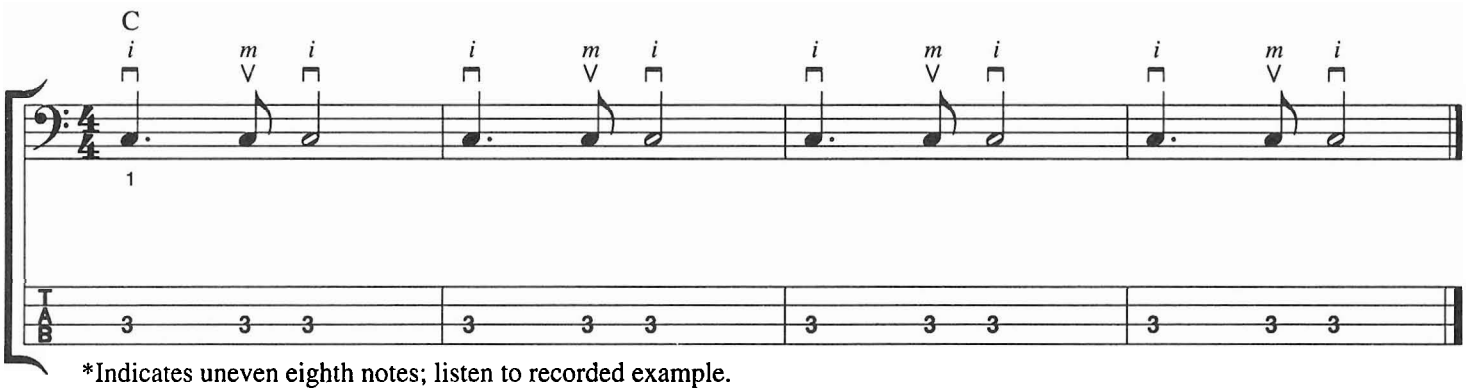


CD 21

Example 7: Country Pattern

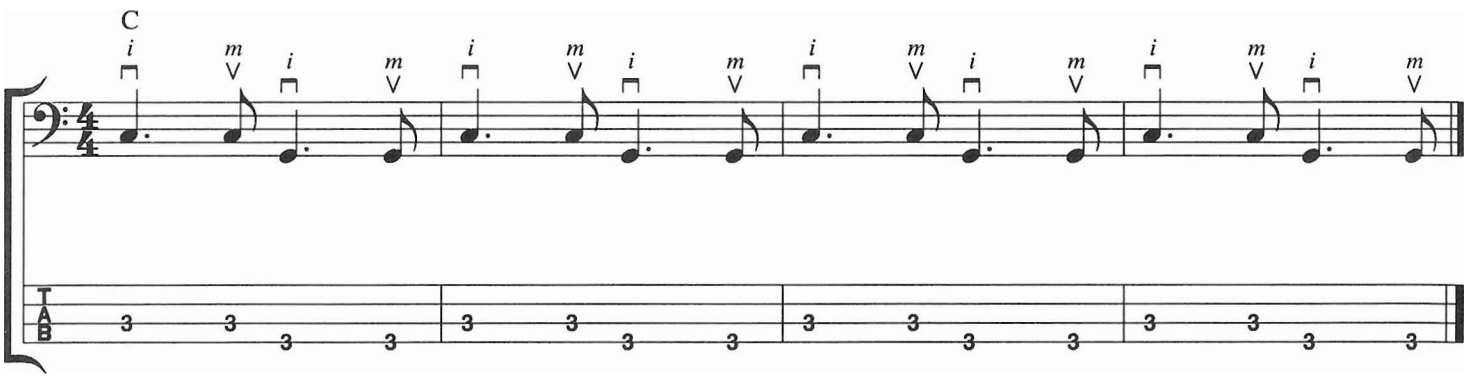
One style that uses the fifth below the root is Country. This exercise uses the root with the bass drum (Ex.7A), then adds the fifth below, this time also with the bass drum (Ex. 7B), and finally combines the two previous examples (Ex. 7C).

Example 7A — Root with Bass Drum (♩♩ = ♩ 3 ♪)*



*Indicates uneven eighth notes; listen to recorded example.

Example 7B — Adding 5th Below



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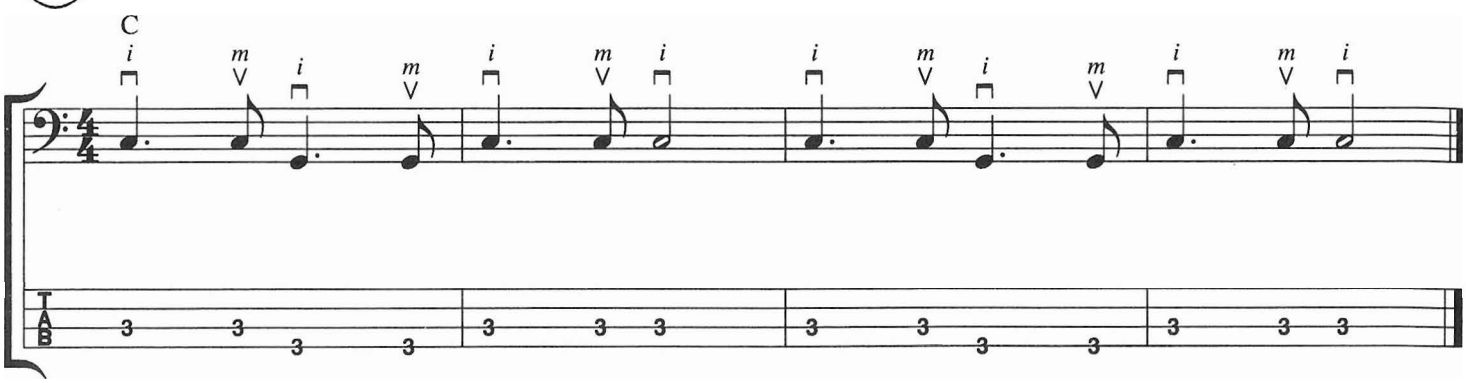
Example 7C — Combination



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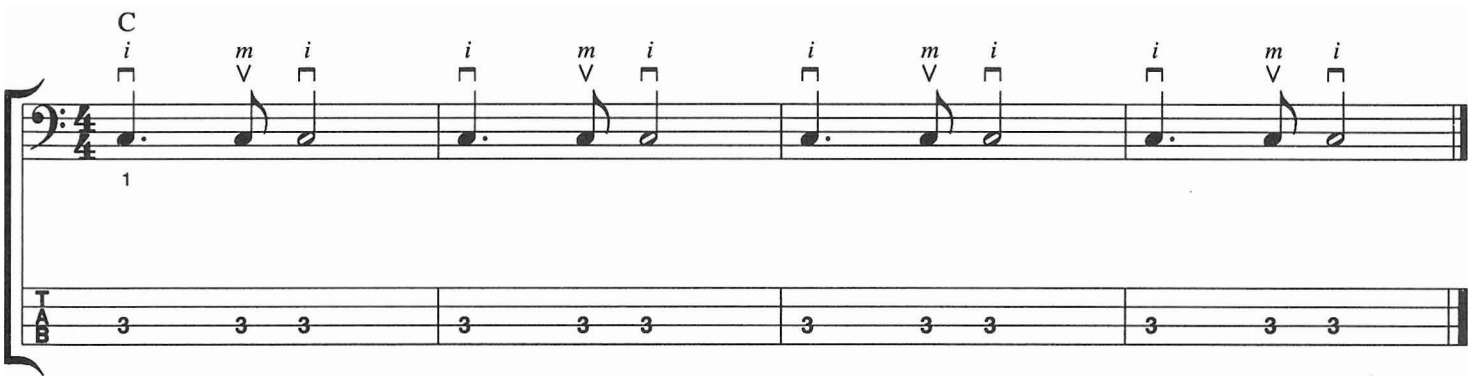
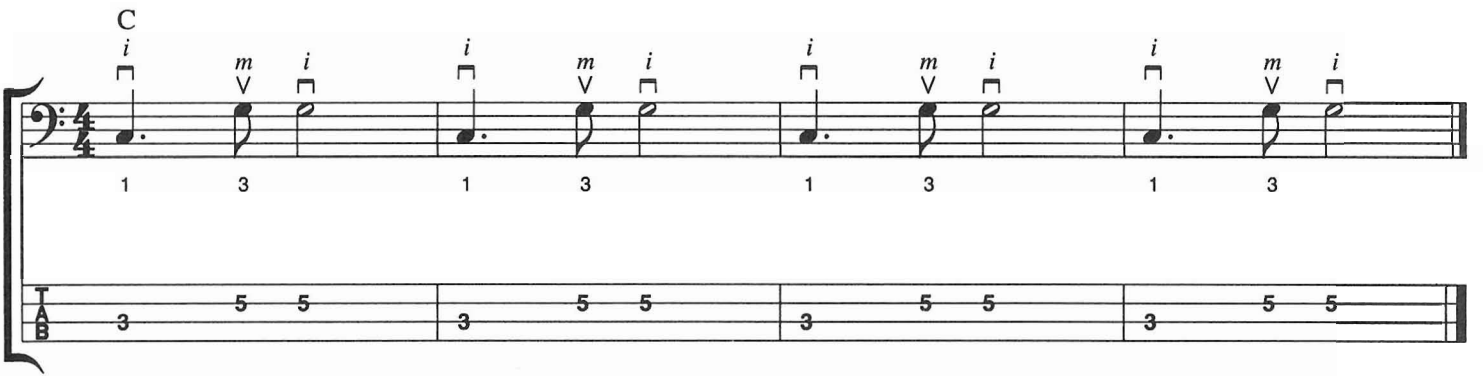
Example 8: Latin Pattern

This pattern uses both the fifth above and below, and is commonly used in Latin bass lines. The first part of the example gives just the root (Ex. 8A), then adds the fifth above (Ex. 8B) and finally the fifth both above and below (Ex. 8C).

Example 8A — Root with Bass Drum/Latin

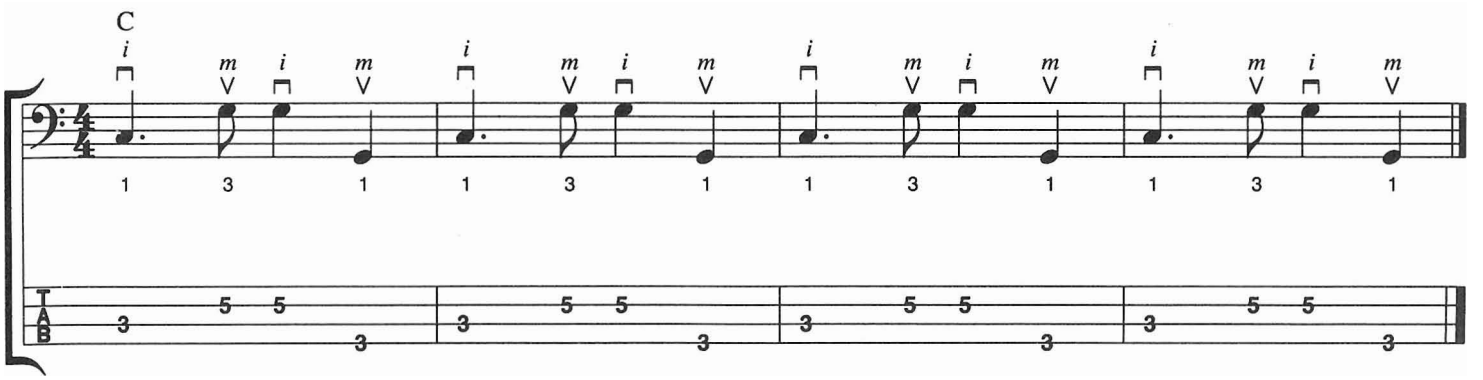


Example 8B — Adding 5th Above



CD 24

Example 8C — Adding 5th Above and Below

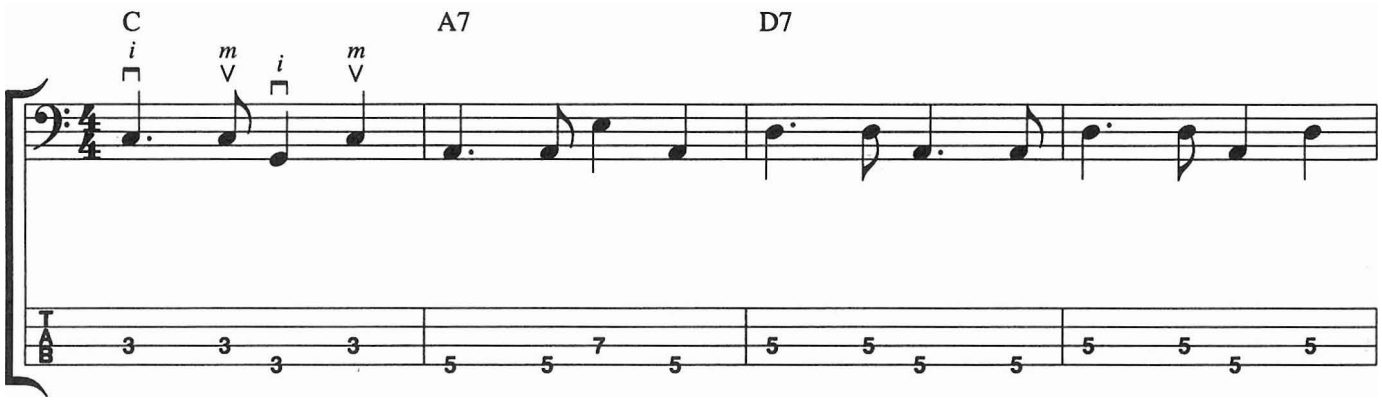


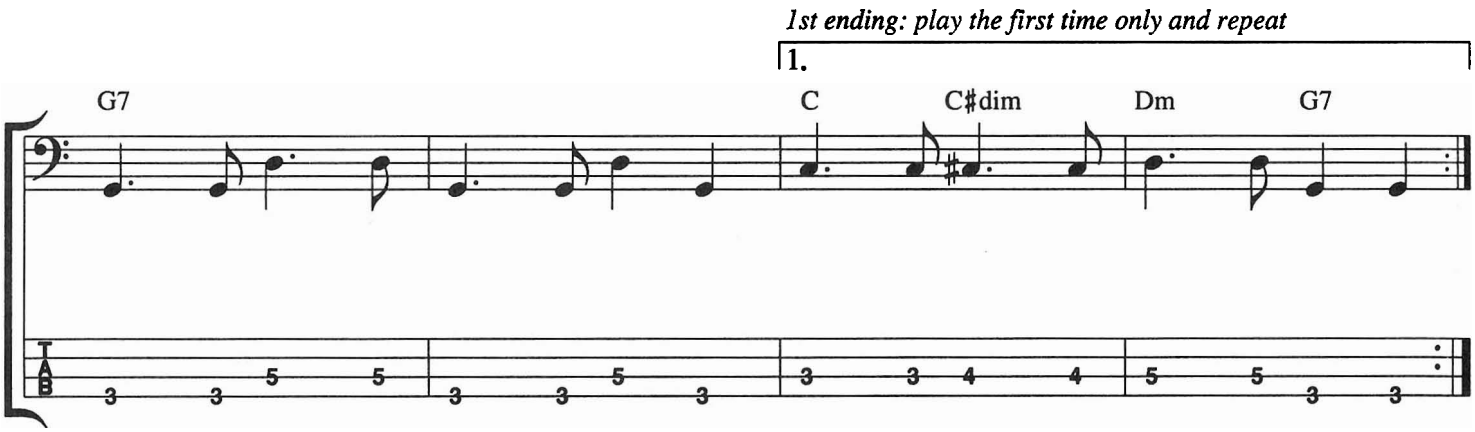
Work on alternating the picking hand and developing a clean attack. Practicing these exercises should help you to lock in with the drummer, but always use a metronome or drum machine to maintain consistent time.

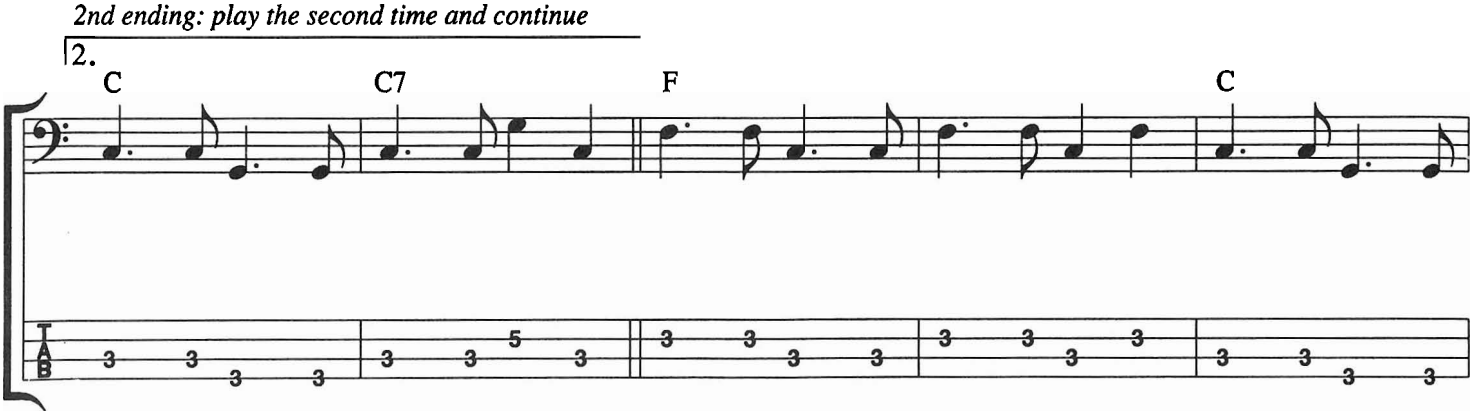
CD 25

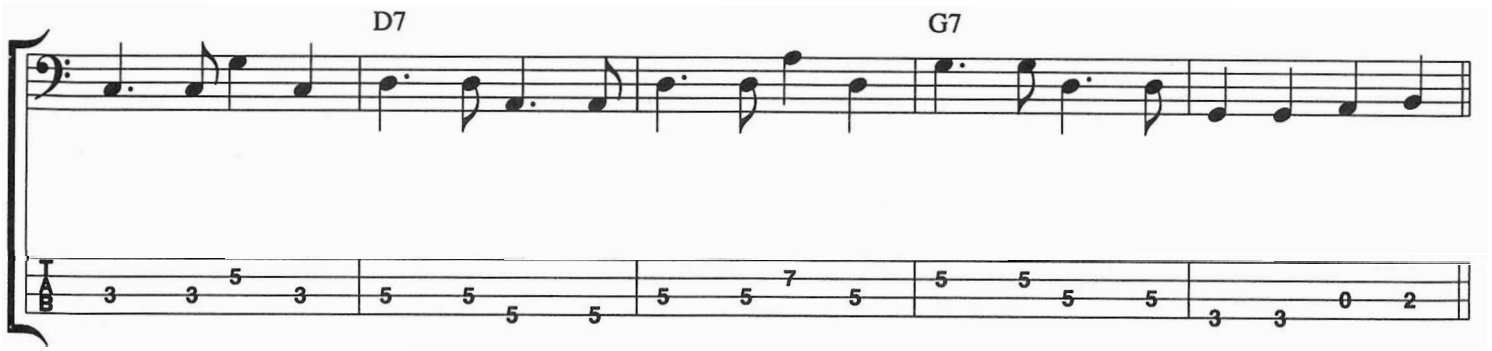
Example 9

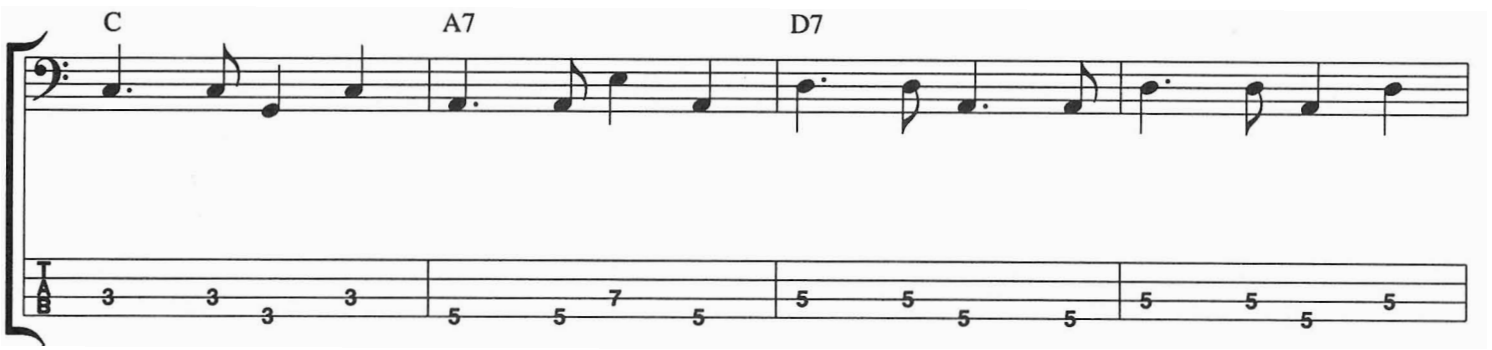
This exercise uses the root to the fifth, both above and below. The chord progression is common to many popular songs and can be played to many different rhythmic feels.

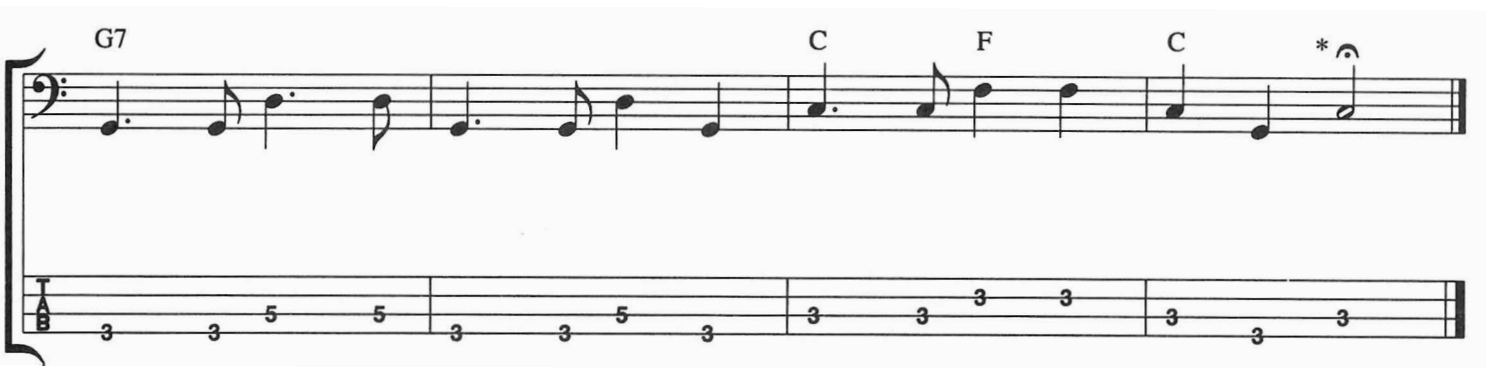












*The fermata indicates to hold the note for an indefinite period of time.

Practice locating fifths above and below all notes on the neck, and familiarize yourself with the patterns of both. Remember to keep alternating the right hand fingering.

PLAYIN' THE BLUES

CD 26 The Blues is one of the most popular music styles. It's not very hard to play, but it is a lot of fun. It is a good idea to practice the blues, as most jam sessions usually contain at least one. A blues bass line is easy to get under your fingers initially, so you can start jamming right away.

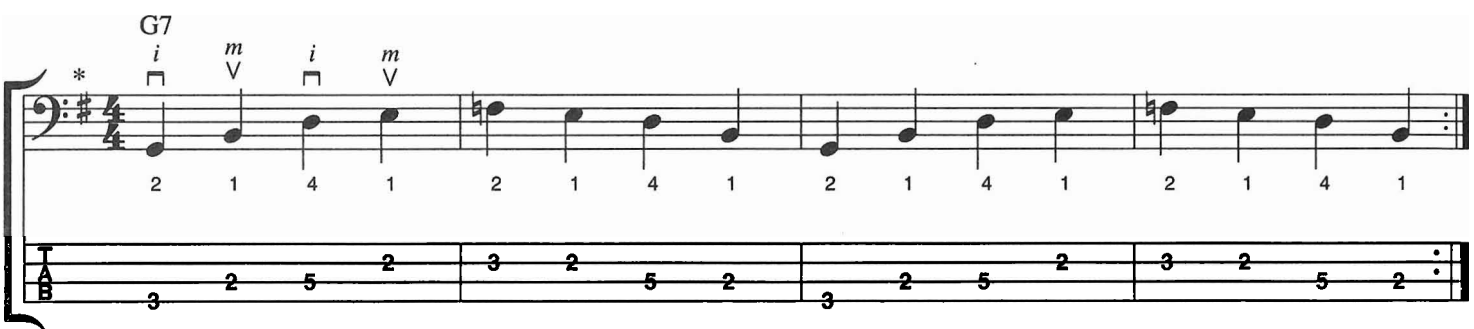
CD 27 Example 10

This example uses the G major chord arpeggio: root, third and fifth, but adds the sixth and flat seventh on the D string, walking up the notes and back down again. The sixth of a G major chord is six notes up the G major scale (G - A - B - C - D - E) and the flat seventh is seven notes up the G major scale (G - A - B - C - D - E - F♯) lowered a half step to F♮. Note: When you "flat" the seventh, you lower it one half step. If F♯ is the seventh, then F is the flat seventh, not F♭.

G major scale:	G	A	B	C	D	E	F♯	G
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
G blues line:	G		B		D	E	F♮	
	1		3		5	6	♭7	

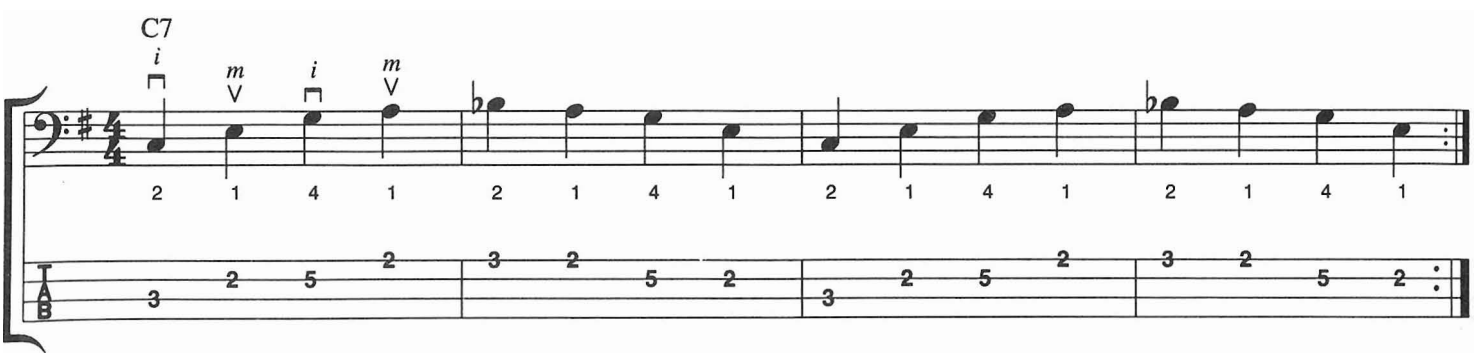
The first part of this example shows this bass line with G as the root (Ex. 10A), then with C as the root (Ex. 10B), with D as the root (Ex. 10C) and finally all three linked together in the typical blues progression (Ex. 10D).

Example 10A — G7 Blues Pattern

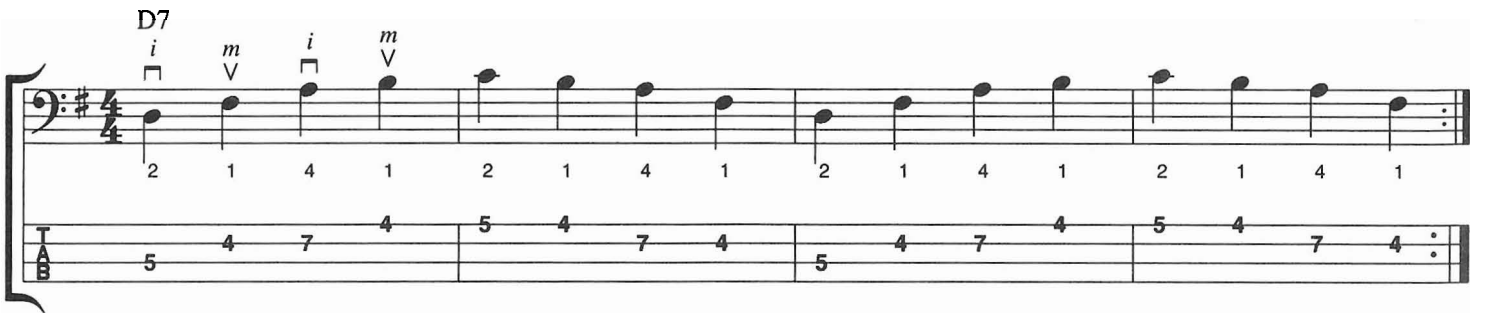


*Indicates Key of G major — all F's are sharp.

Example 10B — C7 Blues Pattern

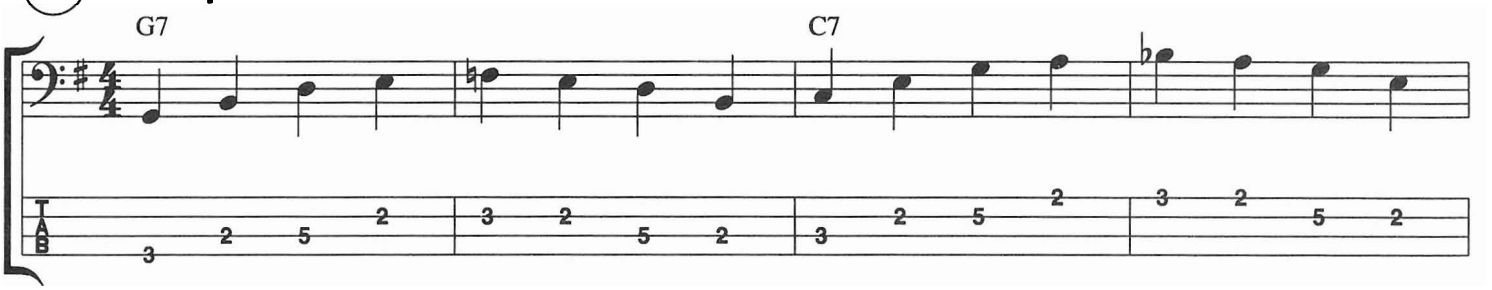


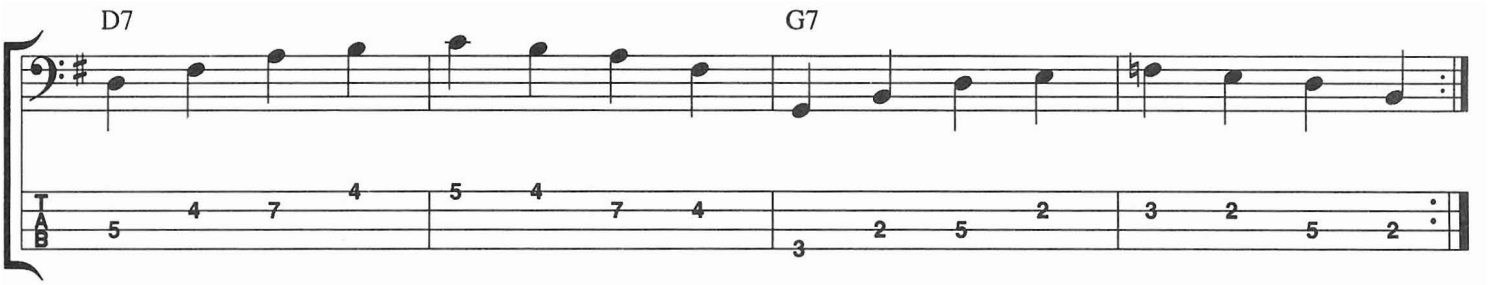
Example 10C — D7 Blues Pattern



CD 28

Example 10D — Combination Blues Patterns — Quarter Notes

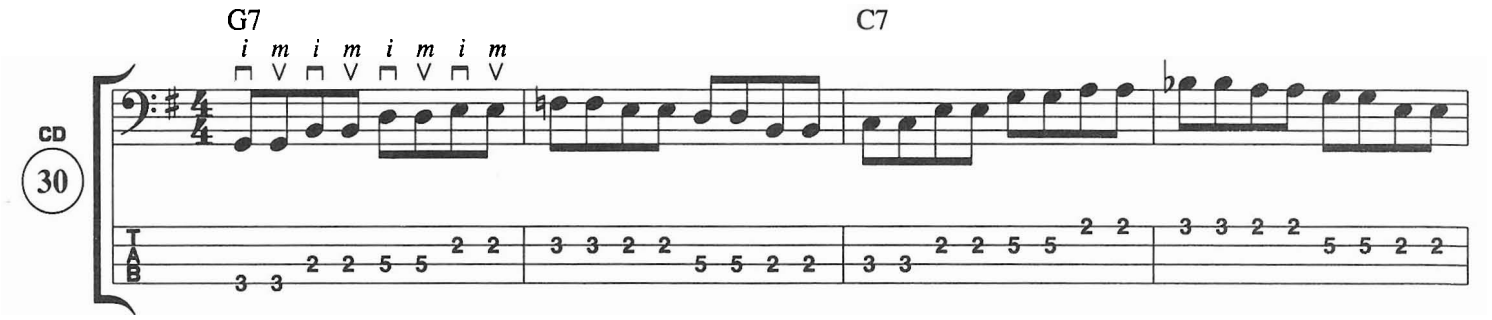




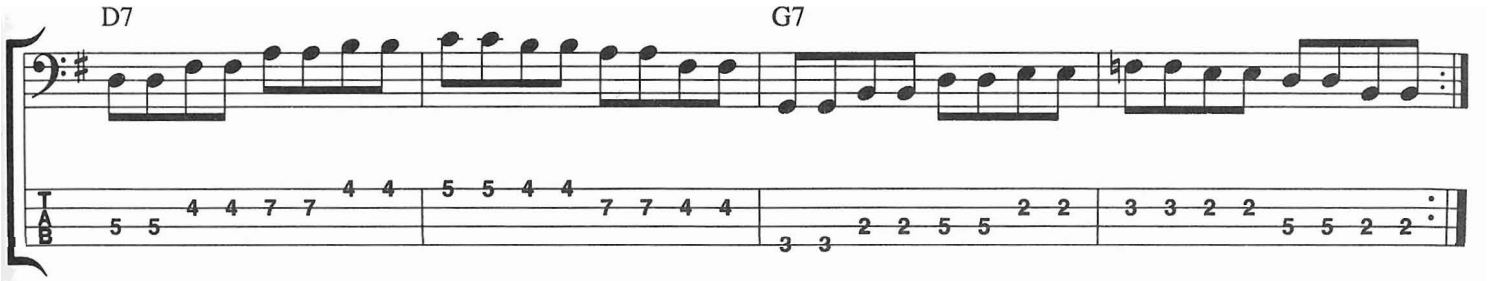
CD 29

Example 11: Combination Blues Pattern — Eighth Notes

This example is similar to Example 10D, but uses eighth notes instead of quarter notes. Remember to alternate the right hand fingering.



CD 30



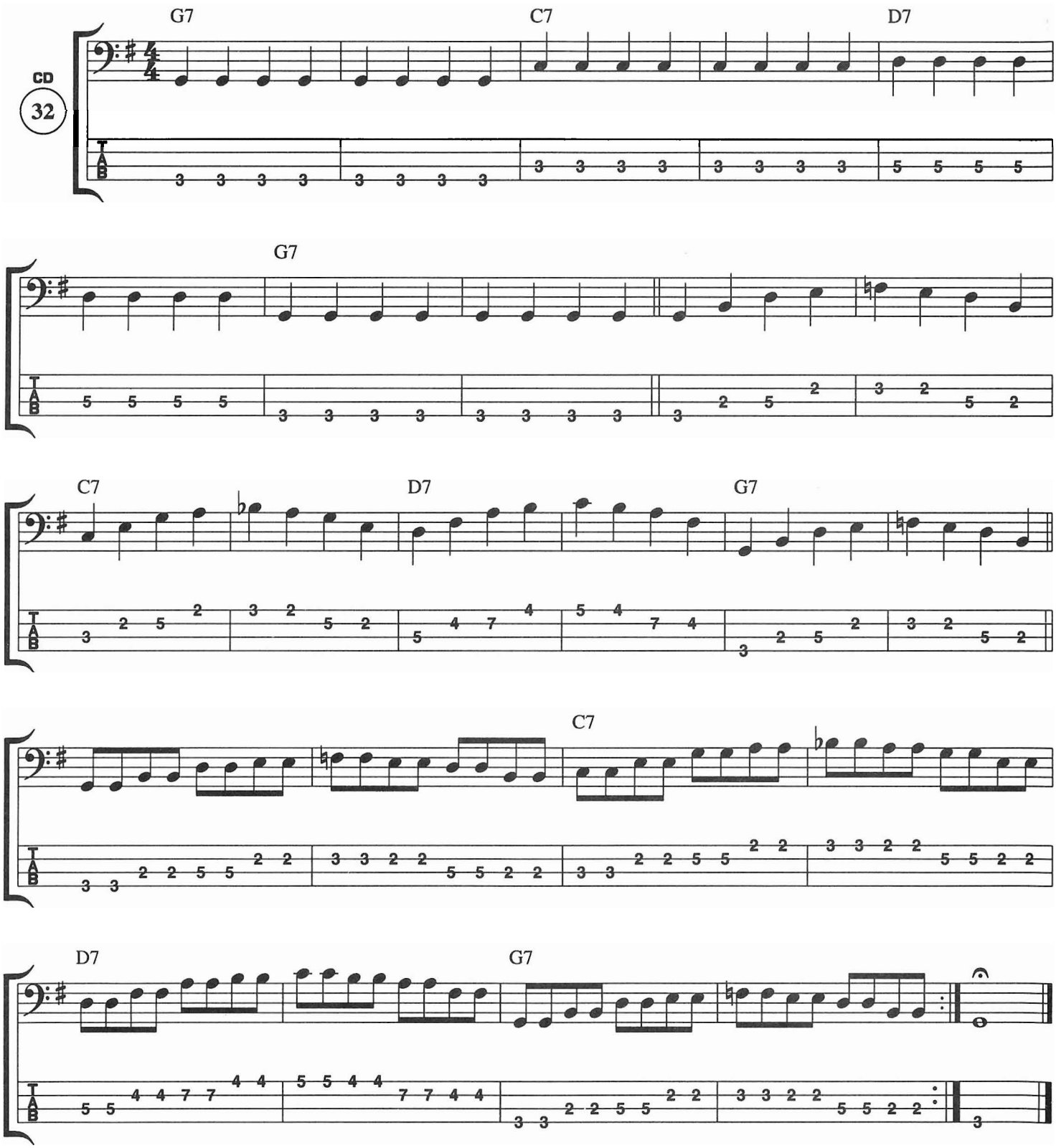
After mastering this bass line, try using it with different notes as the root. Simply start the pattern on a different note and keep the fingering and fret spacing the same.

CD 31

Example 12: Complete Blues

This example uses what is called straight time, where the eighth notes are all even (the same length of time).

CD 32



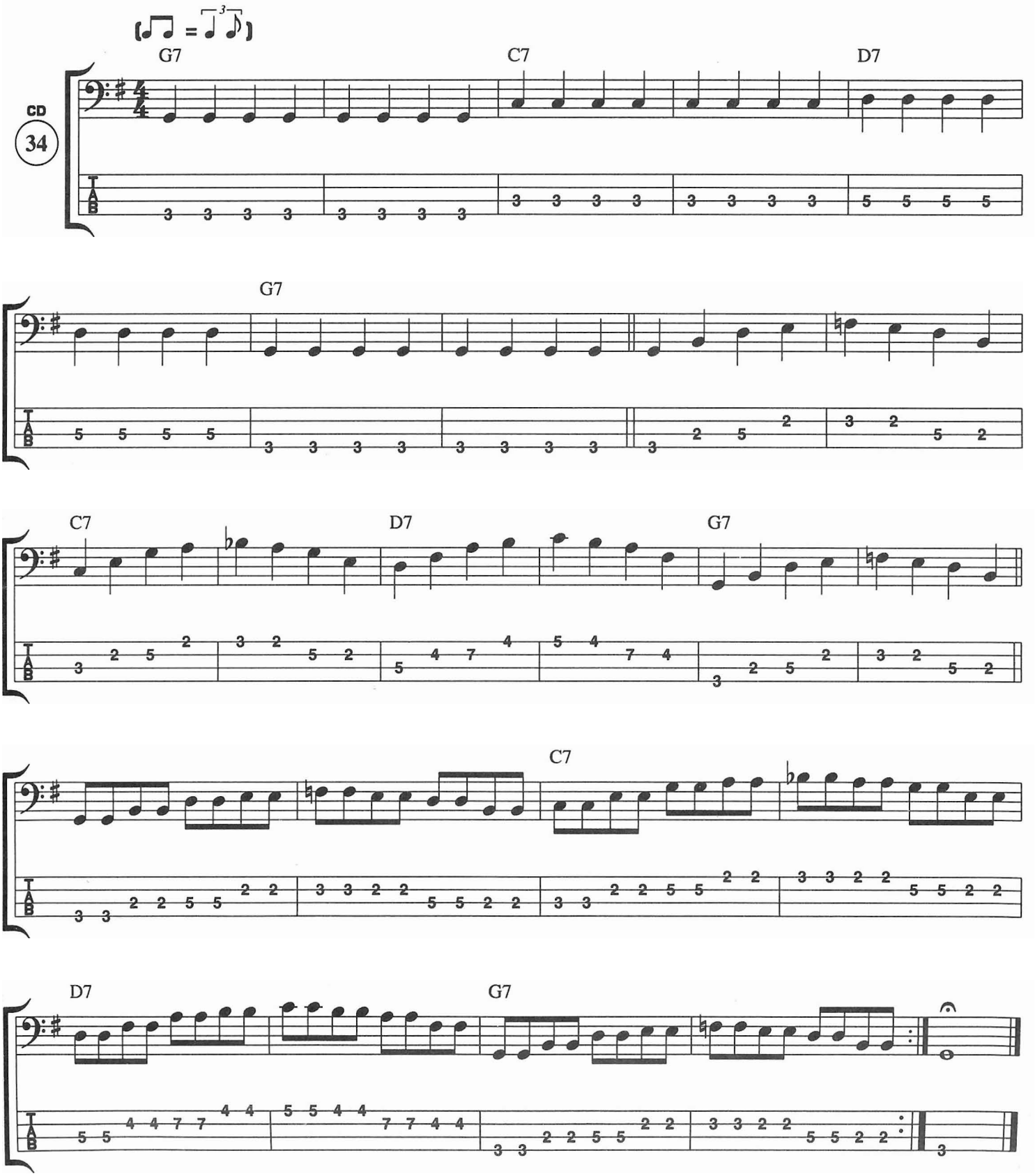
As you play, listen to the drummer and make sure that your even eighth notes are locked in with his eighth notes. Sometimes the drummer will play eighth notes on the hi-hat, sometimes on the ride cymbal, or fluctuations off the snare and the hi-hat, or the snare and the ride, but just focus on the groove and try to stay even and solid.

CD 33

Example 13: Shuffle Blues

The next example uses the same pattern as Example 12, but uses shuffle time instead of straight time. In shuffle time, the eighth notes are no longer evenly spaced, as in straight time, but the first eighth note is a longer length of time than the second eighth note. This only affects the eighth notes, not the quarter notes. Listen to the recorded examples to help better distinguish between straight and shuffle eighth notes.

CD 34

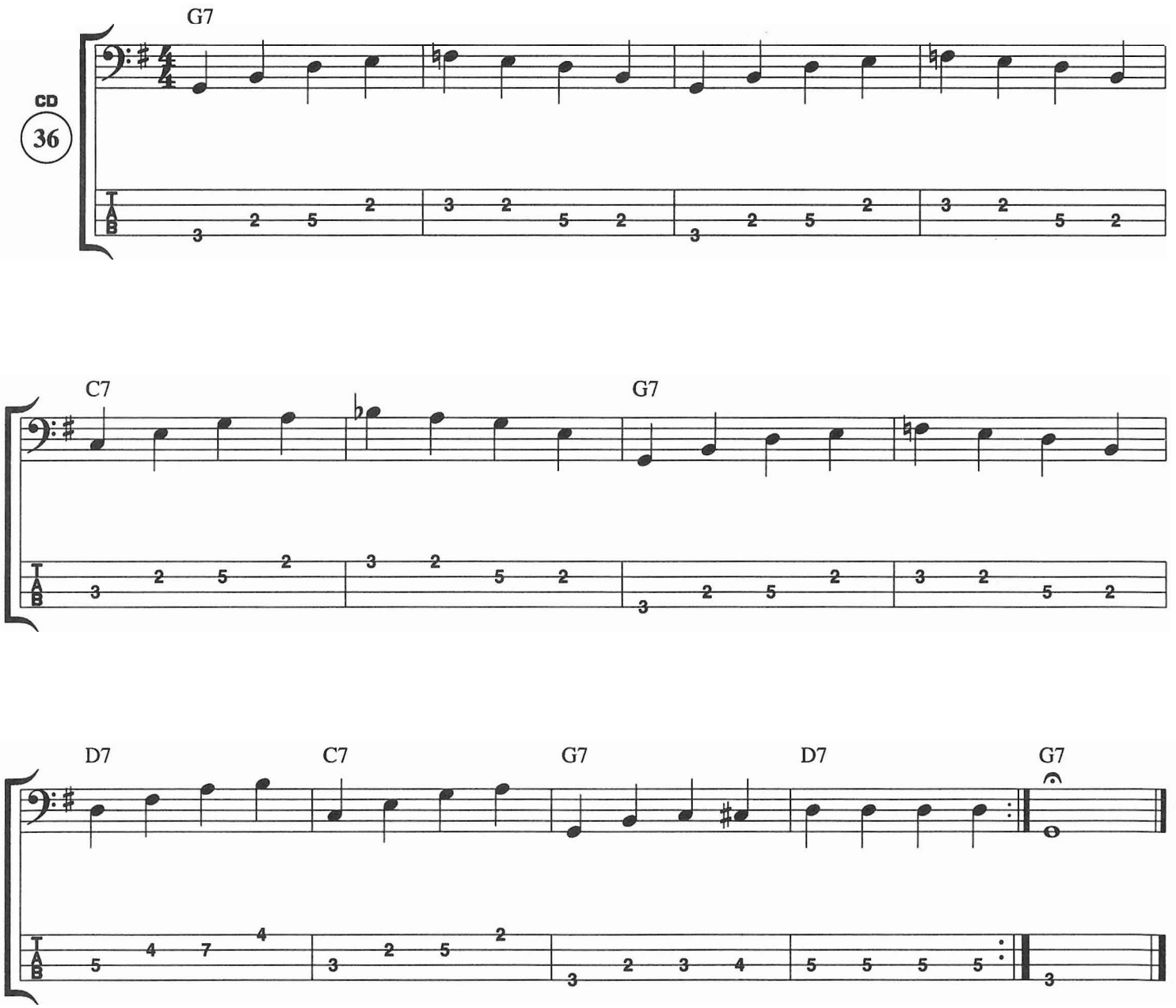


CD 35

Example 14: 12-Bar Blues

A common blues progression is the 12-bar blues. This blues is 12 bars (measures) long and uses the G , C and D chords. Also, the last two bars contain the turnaround. The turnaround comes at the end of a song, and is a chord or series of chords which helps to indicate the end of the form by "turning it around" to the beginning. This turnaround uses a chromatic (all half steps) approach from the third of the G chord (B) to the root of the D chord (D).

CD 36

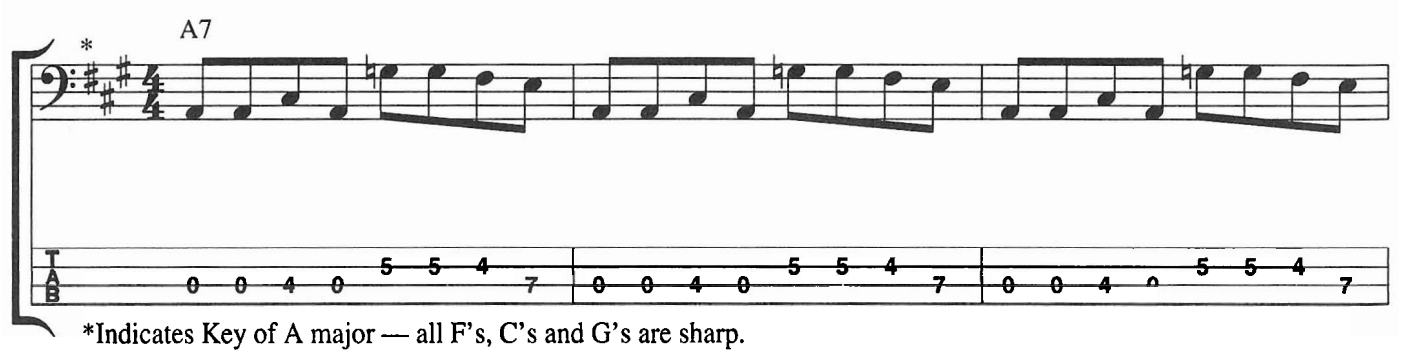


After working on the 12-bar blues in G, try playing it around the neck in other keys, keeping the same relationship between the notes.

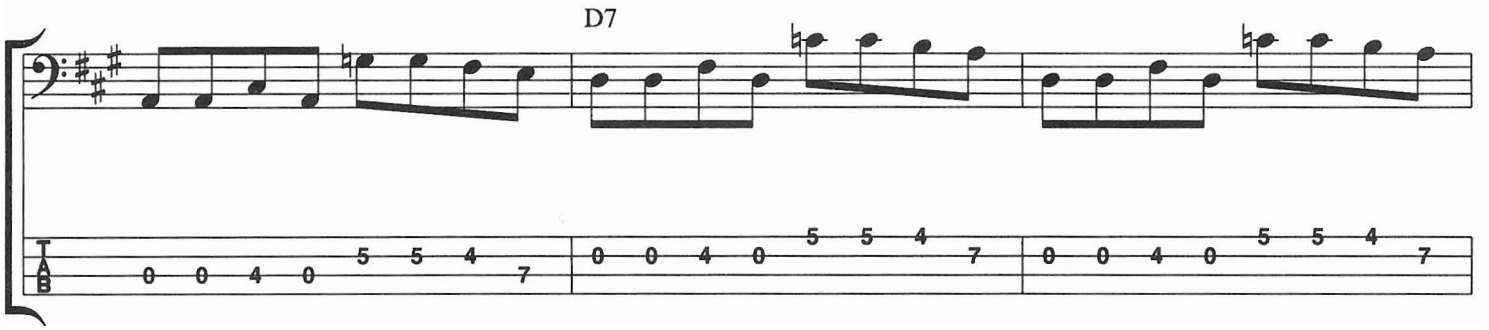
CD 37

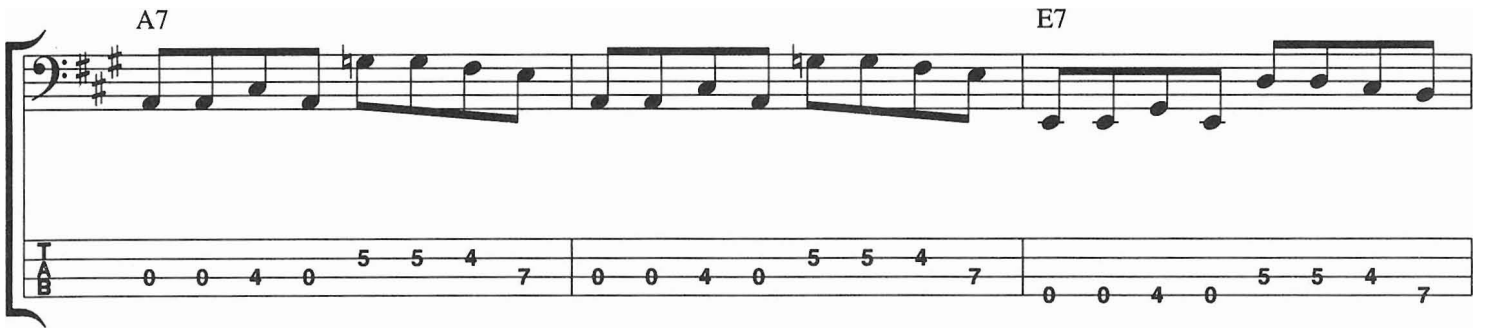
Example 15

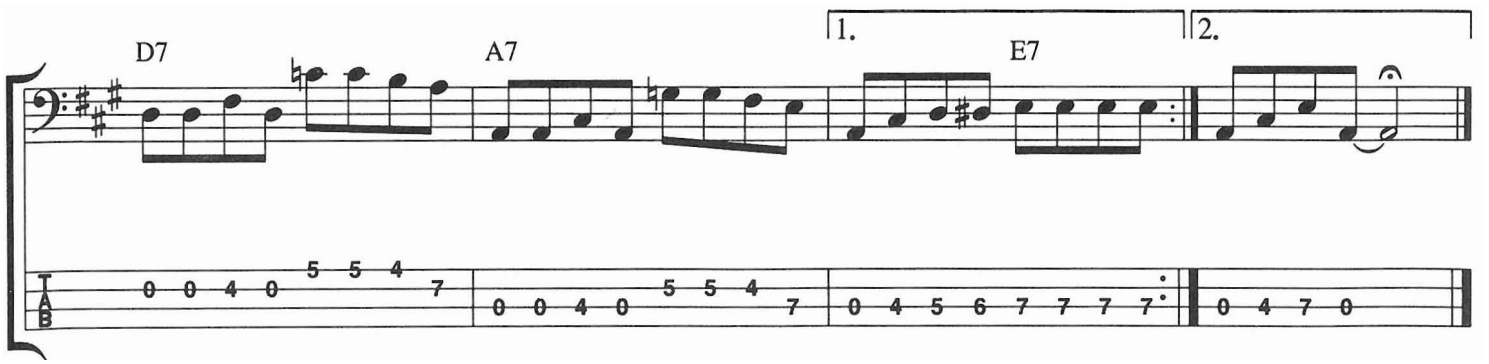
Example 15 is a variation of the 12-bar blues and is typical of most rock and roll songs. This example incorporates a similar blues riff as used in the 12-bar blues, but varies the pattern a bit. It is also transposed to the key of A, so the open string notes are used.



*Indicates Key of A major — all F's, C's and G's are sharp.

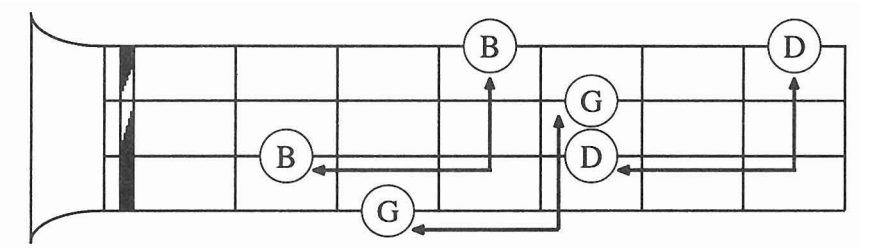






SLAP/POP TECHNIQUE

CD 38 This technique of playing the bass has become very popular in recent years, and mainly consists of learning to think percussively (like a drummer). The first step is to be able to find the octaves on the bass. An octave is eight notes away from the root, and has the same note name as the root. The octave from any note can be found by moving two strings up and two frets forward. Practice finding all the octaves on the E and A strings by starting with the open strings and working up the neck chromatically.

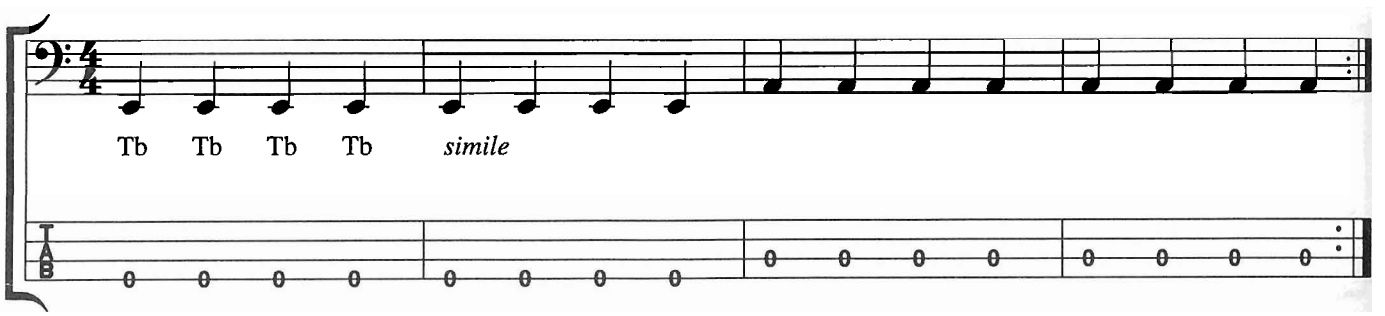


CD 39

Example 16: The Slap

The next step in this technique is the slap, which is handled by the right hand thumb. The thumb acts like a hammer, striking the string with the outside of the knuckle, near the area on the bass where the neck meets the body. This can be varied for different sounds; for instance, by slapping further back towards the bridge over the pickups gives a brighter, much more open sound, while slapping directly over the neck gives a thinner, tighter sound. The thumb strikes the string, but does not lay on the string. It snaps back away from the string, allowing it to vibrate. Practice slapping the open strings to help establish a good thumb tone.

CD 40

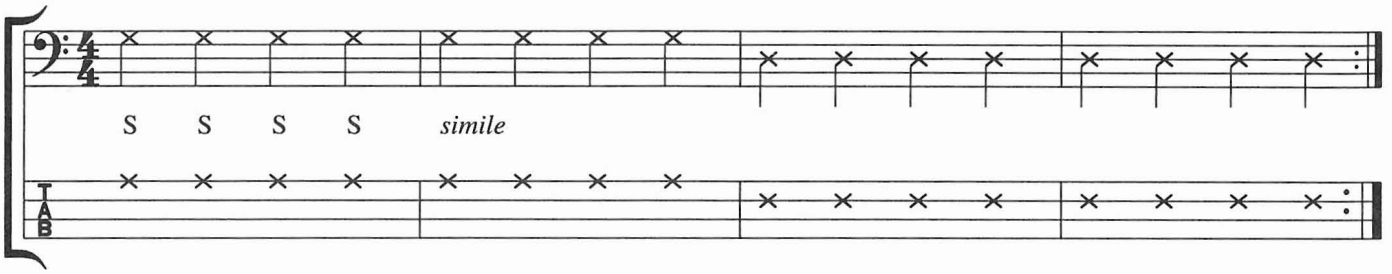


CD 41

Example 17: The Pop

The final step to learning this technique is the pop, which is done with the right-hand index finger. This is achieved by pulling the string with the tip of the index finger, snapping it away from the fingerboard.

CD 42



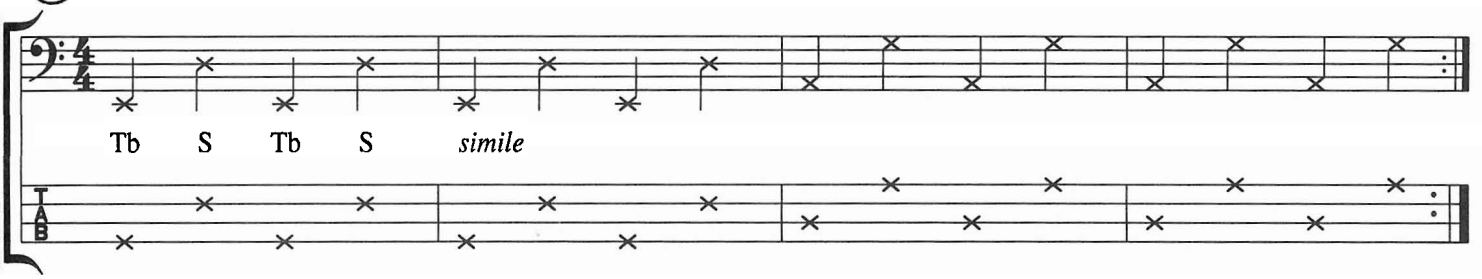
CD 43

Example 18

This example combines the slap and the pop together. The first part alternates with one slap and one pop. Work on making the slap/pop technique one fluent motion, rather than two separate motions. As the thumb hammers down, the index finger moves into position to snap the string up, moving the hand back into its starting position.

CD 44

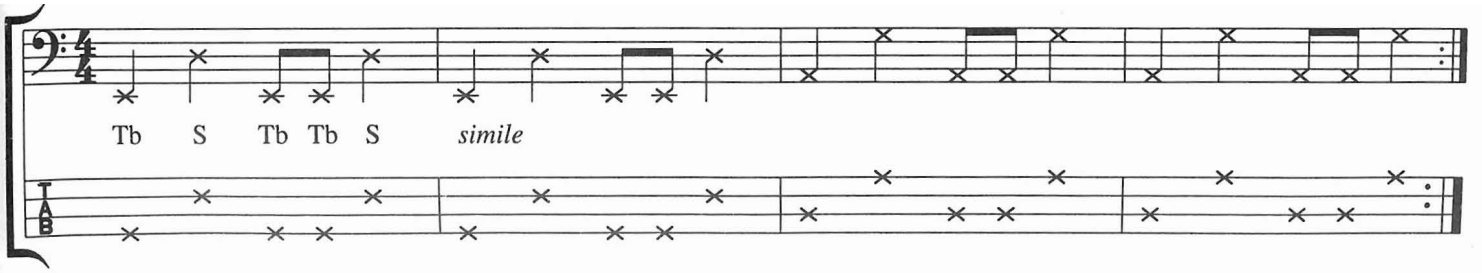
Example 18A — Combining Slap and Pop



The next part of this example uses a variation of this technique, combining two slaps together. Since this technique has a very percussive feel to it, try to match what the drummer is playing by matching the slap with the drummer's bass drum and the pop with the drummer's snare. This example uses one slap and one pop, then two slaps and one pop.

CD 45

Example 18B — Variation

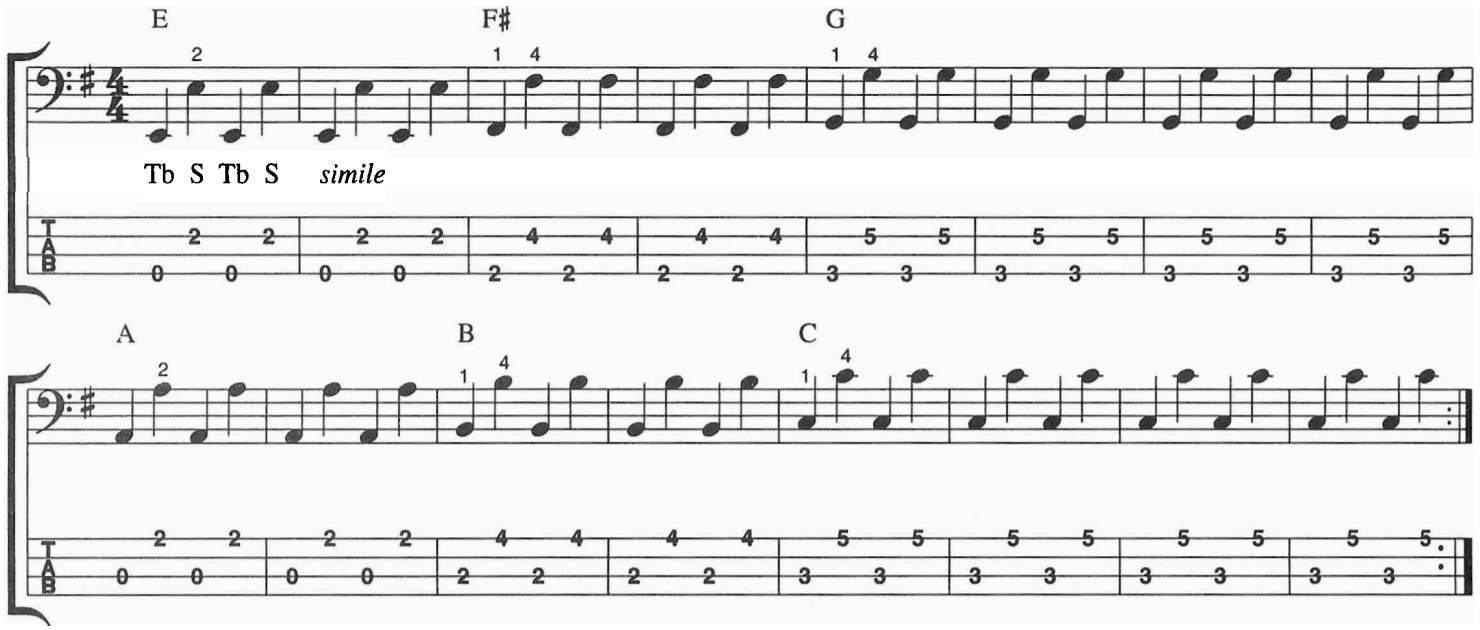


CD 46

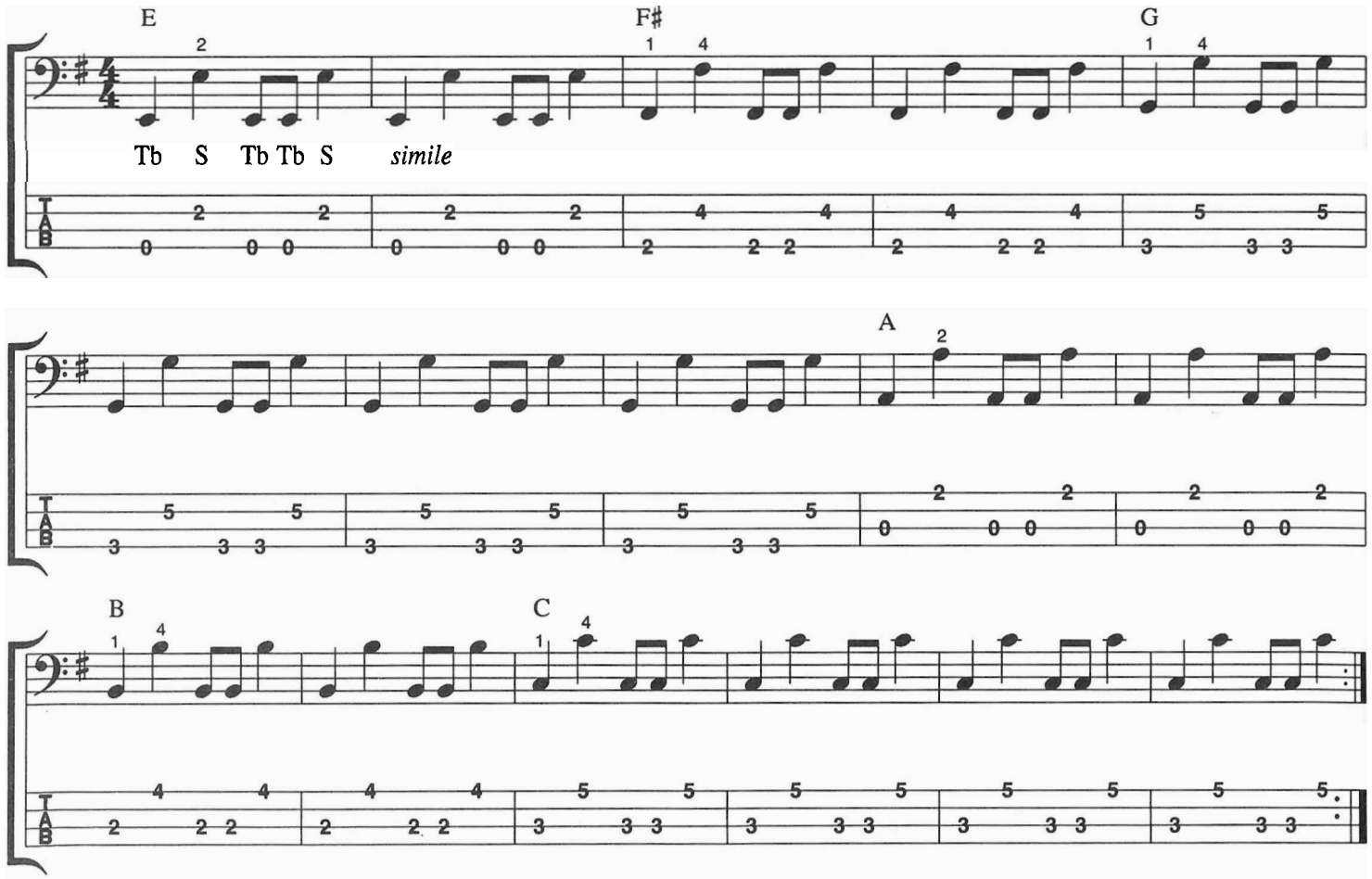
Example 19

This example uses the previous technique, but is played over a chord progression, slapping the roots of the chords on the E and A strings and popping the octaves on the D and G strings. The exercise starts with the basic slap/pop technique (Ex. 19A), then incorporates the variation in the right hand (Ex. 19B) and finally a combination of the two (Ex. 19C).

Example 19A — Octave Exercise

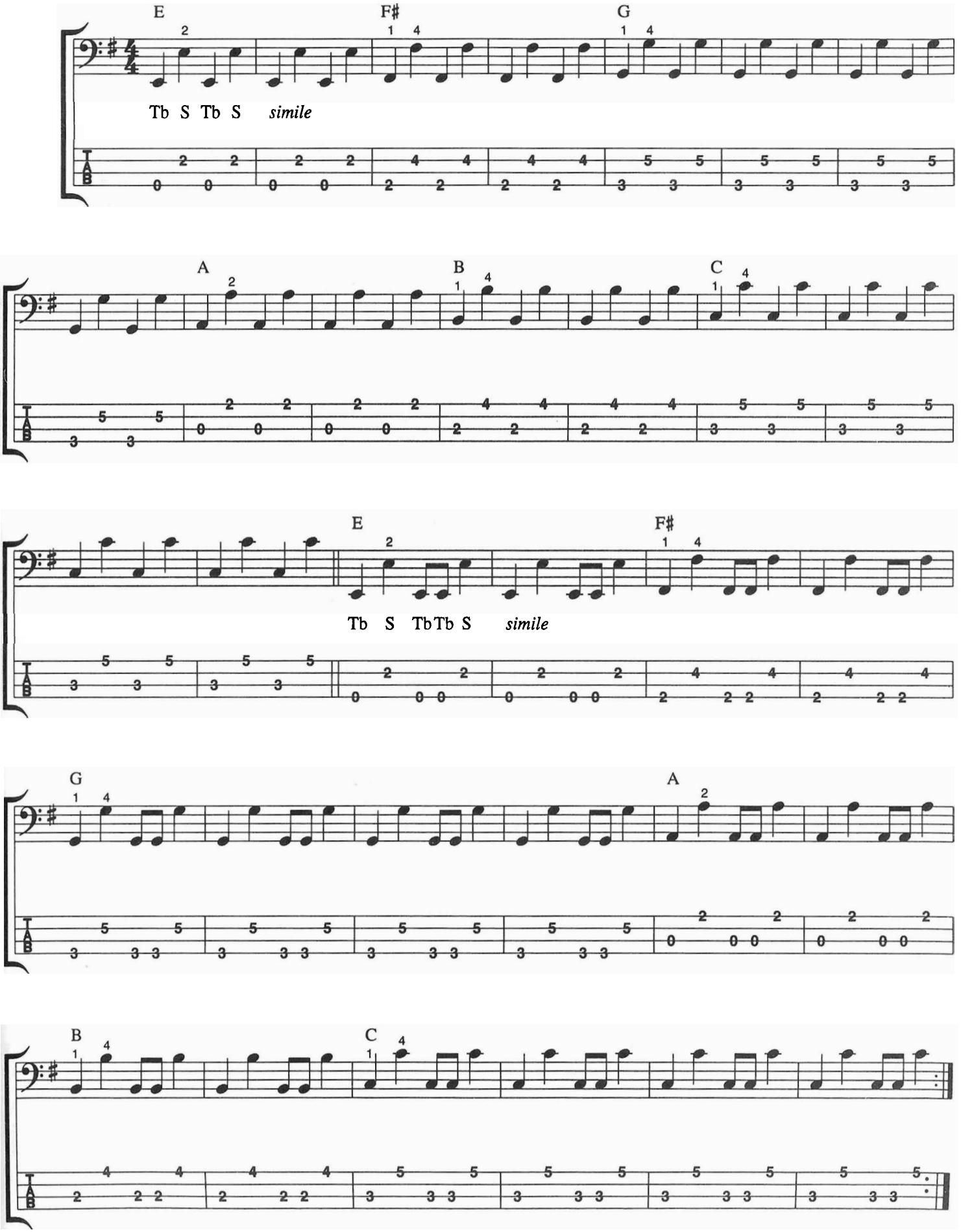


Example 19B — Variation



CD 47

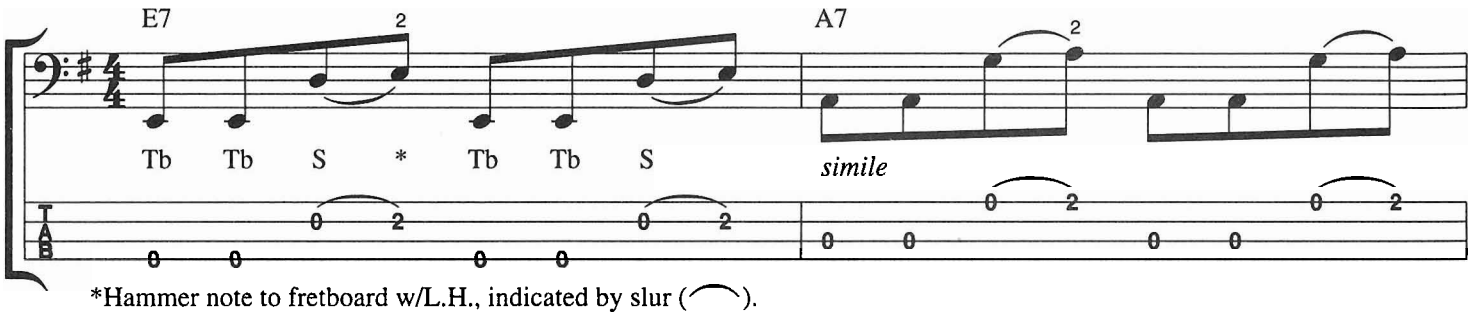
Example 19C — Combination



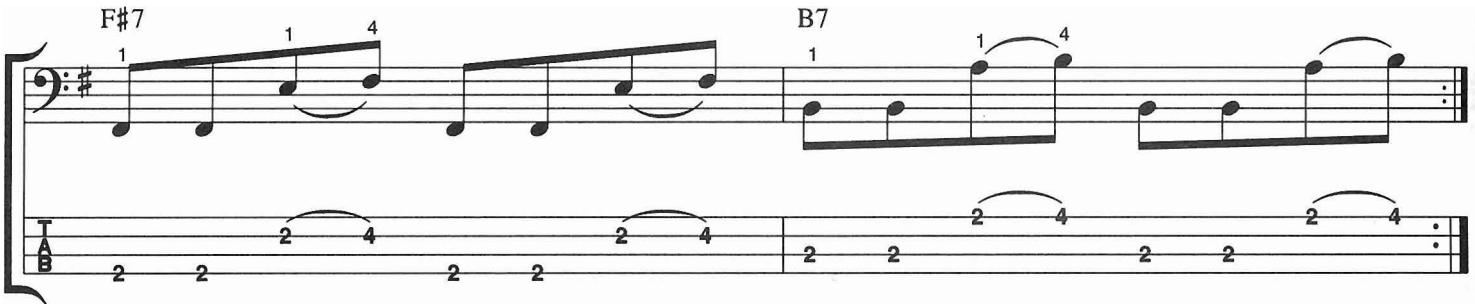
CD 48

Example 20: The Hammer-on

This example uses a technique known as the hammer-on, where the note is sounded by hammering the string to the fretboard using the tip of any finger of the left hand. The note sounds by the left hand attack (the right hand is not used). Some strength in the left hand is required to perform this technique, practice it daily so the left and right hand attacks sound similar. It is also important to relax; hammering too hard will result in a poor sound.



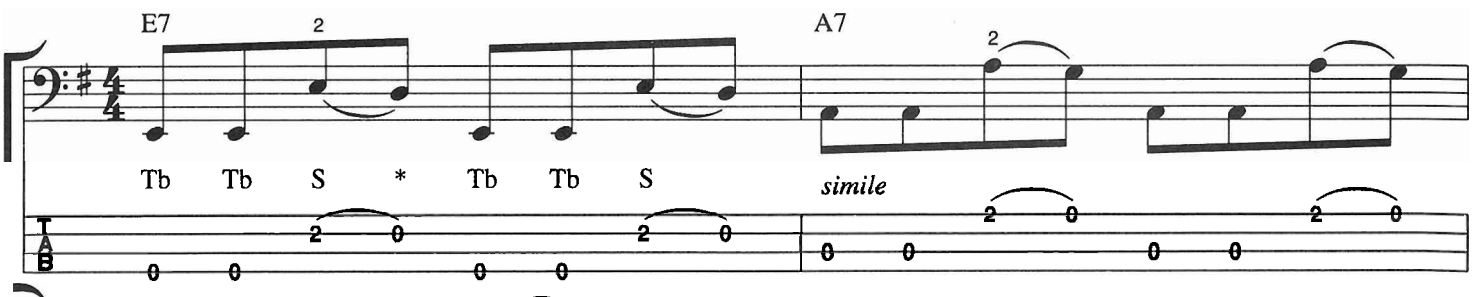
*Hammer note to fretboard w/L.H., indicated by slur ( ).



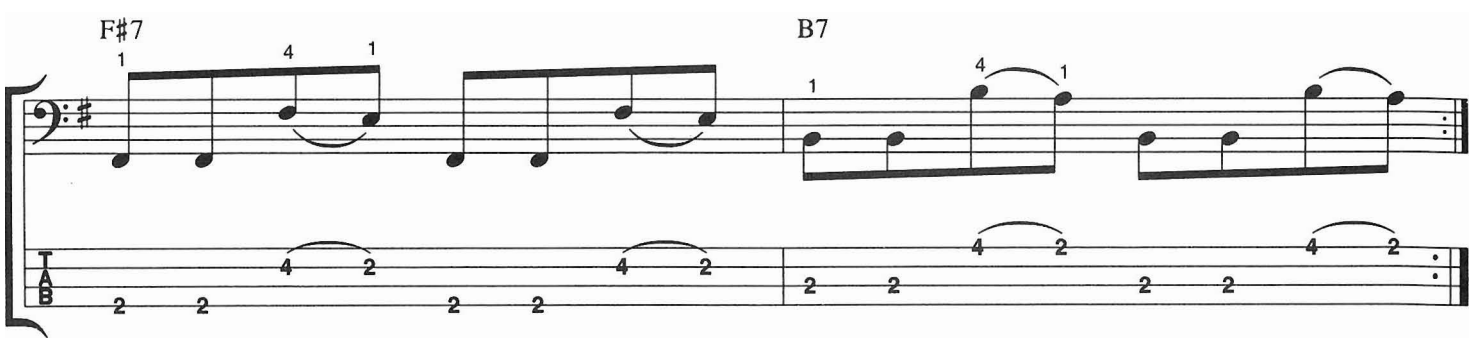
CD 49

Example 21: The Pull-off

The pull-off is also a left hand attack technique. Pull the string with the left hand finger tip as it lifts off the fingerboard (similar to plucking the string with the right hand). Again, practice until the pull-off sounds similar to the right hand attack.



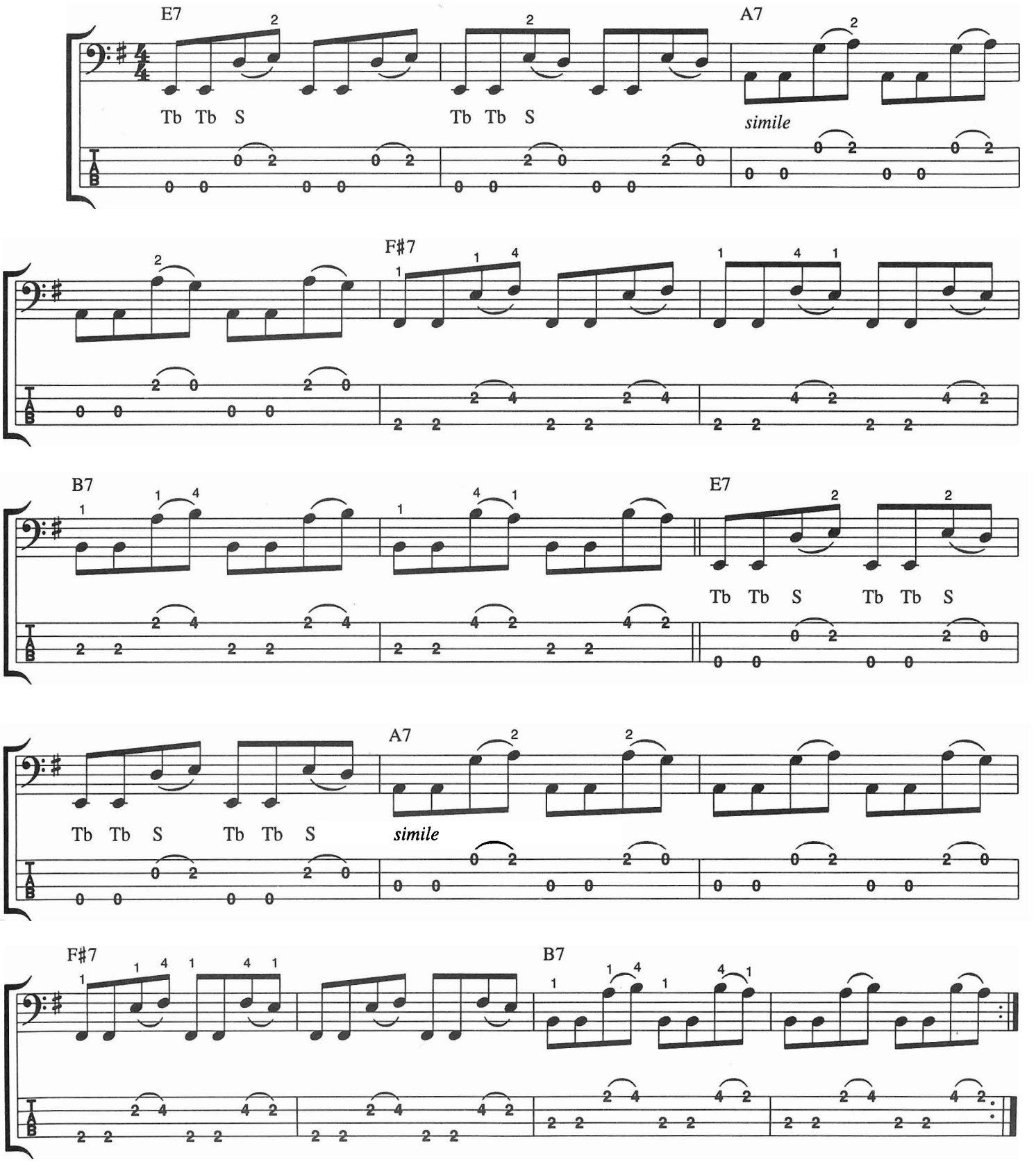
*Pull string w/L.H., indicated by slur ( ).



CD 50

Example 22

This example combines the hammer-on and pull-off techniques. If you're unable to keep up with the recording, practice at a slower tempo with a metronome or drum machine and build the tempo up gradually.



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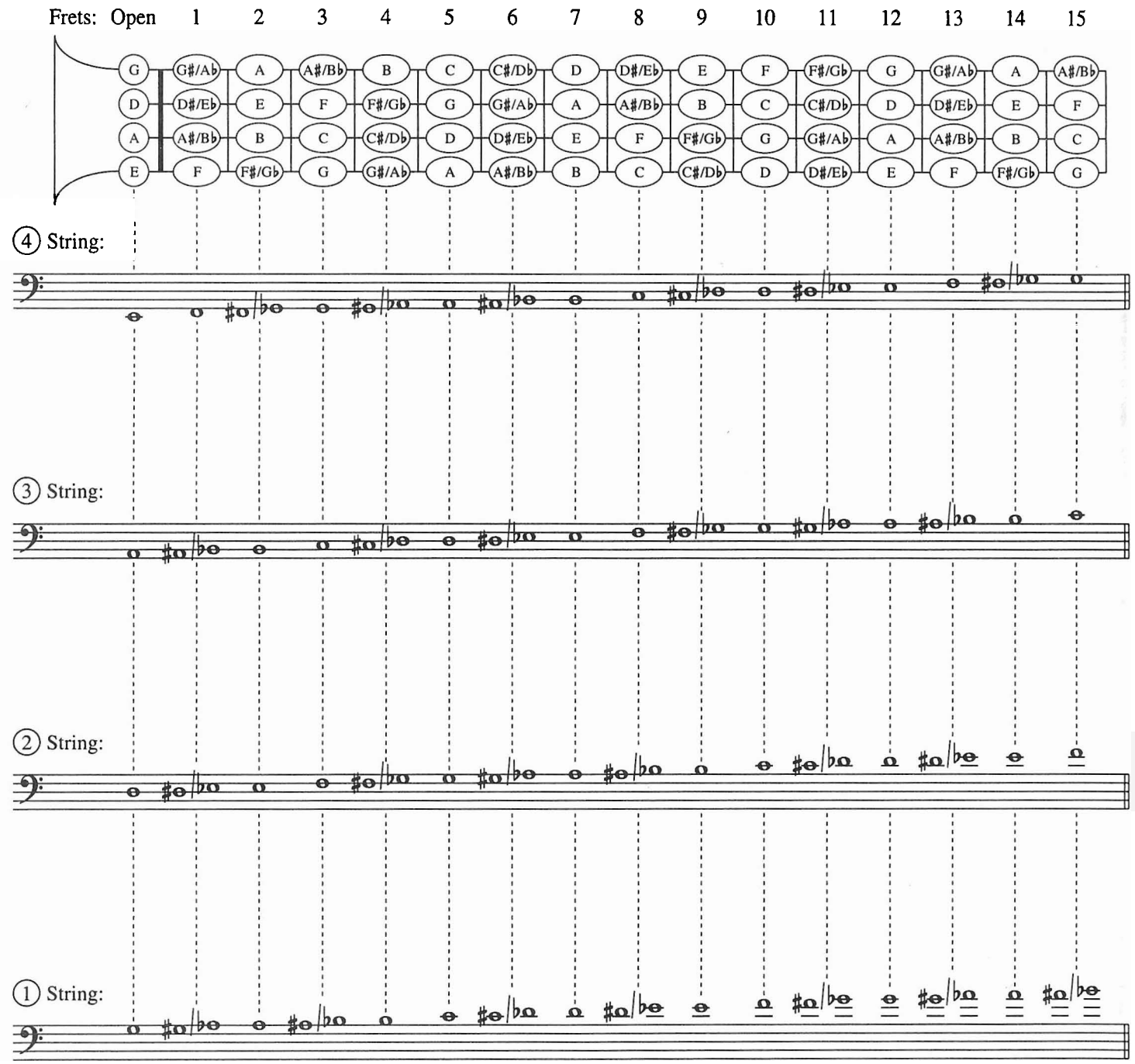

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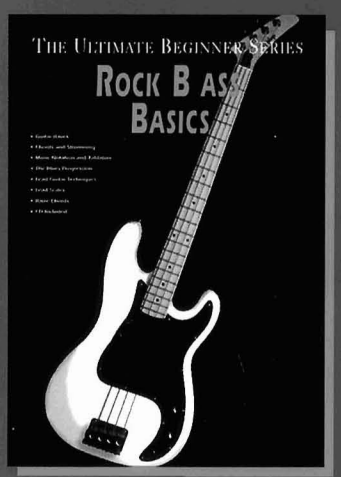

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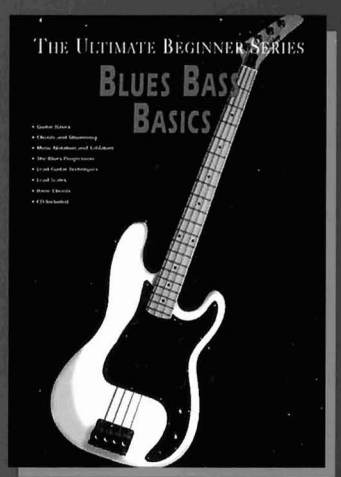

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